



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

**Brussels, 23 October 2007 (24.10)
(OR en,es)**

14210/07

**ENV 541
DEVGEN 200
RELEX 750
CONUN 61
ACP 199**

NOTE

from : General Secretariat
to : Delegations

Subject : 8th Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification
(Madrid, 3 to 14 September 2007)
– Information from the Spanish delegation

Delegations will find annexed information from the Spanish delegation on the above subject, which will be dealt with under "other business" at the meeting of the Council (Environment) on 30 October 2007.

**Information from the Spanish delegation on the desertification COP held in Madrid
(3 to 14 September 2007)**

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is the cornerstone of the international community's efforts to combat desertification and land degradation. The UNCCD was adopted on 17 June 1994, entered into force on 26 December 1996, and currently has 191 signatory countries and institutions.

The eighth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 8) to the UNCCD was held in the Palacio de Exposiciones y Congresos in Madrid from 3 to 14 September 2007, with 2,500 participants from 165 countries and 2 observers - delegates from the signatory countries and institutions, agencies of the United Nations system, international organisations and representatives of civil society.

Concurrently, meetings were held of the subsidiary bodies of the Convention such as the sixth session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 6) and the eighth session of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST 8). Additional meetings were also held, including a special session, chaired by the Spanish Minister for the Environment, Cristina Narbona, in which a dialogue took place between high-level officials and political authorities on "Desertification and adaptation to climate change".

In parallel, the Seventh Forum of Parliamentarians was held on September 12 and 13, in the Chamber of Deputies. Its Chairman, Mr Manuel Marín Gonzalez, formally opened the event, which was attended by the Minister for the Environment. The Forum comprised parliamentarians from 22 countries (in some cases, the Speaker or Deputy Speaker of the Chamber), Members of the European Parliament and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, as well as their Spanish hosts, representatives of both Chambers. The Forum's deliberations resulted in the "Declaration adopted by the Members of Parliament", which assessed the implementation of the Convention and reflected on future changes as regards soil degradation and increasing poverty, and on the parliamentarians' commitment and contribution to the fight against desertification.

During the opening ceremony, presided over by Their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Asturias, many delegations emphasised that COP 8 would mark a turning-point in the history of the Convention, referring to two main aspects: the adoption of a 10-year strategic plan for the implementation of the Convention and the reform of certain elements of the institutional structure of the Convention, such as the relationship between the Secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM) and the formats of the meetings of the CRIC and CST, all with a view to providing new opportunities and indications to enable the Convention to achieve its objectives.

In general, the negotiations were constructive and the delegates expressed their satisfaction with the results; however, a decision on the Secretariat's programme and budget was not reached, which has undoubtedly left an element of uncertainty hanging over the implementation of the reforms which were adopted.

COP 8 adopted 29 decisions, among them five relating to the CRIC and eight to the CST. The decision on the 10-year Strategic Plan attracted the attention of most delegates, since it is seen as an opportunity to re-orient the institutions of the Convention towards achieving specific objectives in terms of its practical implementation. The CRIC's decision requesting the Secretariat, in consultation with the Global Mechanism, to revise the format of the national reports, points in the right direction to obtain a greater degree of compliance as a result of having national reports on the implementation of the Convention which are fuller and more precise and refer to specific objectives. The CST's decision establishing for its meetings the format of a scientific conference on a topic which is priority for the development of the Convention also aims at adapting CST results to real needs in the scientific and technical field.

The negotiations on the programme and budget continued into the morning of Saturday 15 September and Japan indicated that it could not in the end accept the 5 % increase in euros over the Secretariat's ordinary budget that had been incorporated in the draft of the corresponding decision, which ultimately was not adopted. The plenary session of the COP agreed that an extraordinary COP should be held within the framework of the next General Assembly of the United Nations in New York, to finalise this element of the programme.

Special session and Madrid Declaration

On 12 and 13 September the "high-level segment" took place, consisting of a round table of 11 Ministers, Deputy Ministers, the Executive Secretaries of the United Nations Conventions on Climate Change and on Biodiversity and Directors of United Nations agencies to discuss the subject of Desertification and Climate Change. 85 speakers subsequently addressed the session.

The round table included reflections such as that "political will and not institutional reforms" would facilitate the implementation of the three Rio Conventions. Among the addresses by the speakers who subsequently addressed the session, that of the new Executive Secretary of the Convention, Luc Gnacadja, was followed with anticipation. He welcomed the 10-year Strategic Plan and expressed his intention to restructure the Secretariat in order to complete it and to adopt a results-based accounting and budgetary structure.

The Chair of COP 8 drew up a declaration, the "Madrid Declaration", based on the content of the special session. It establishes seven areas of strategic interest for the fight against desertification:

- establishment of specific, measurable targets and indicators in the fight against desertification
- establishment of targets relating to the creation of carbon sinks and the improvement of land productivity in drylands

- Consideration of the social and economic costs associated with desertification, and especially the costs of failing to act, in response to soil degradation, to raise awareness and efficiently increase support for the affected areas
- Strengthening cooperation between the three Rio conventions
- Promotion of scientific and technological cooperation on vulnerability, degradation and carbon sinks
- Improving relations between institutions and programmes to facilitate access by UNCCD parties to human and financial resources
- Promotion of effective participation by NGOs and other civil society stakeholders in the UNCCD process.

The 10-year Strategic Plan

The approval of the plan, together with a set of provisions to initiate its development, probably constitutes the main result of COP 8, or at least the one which is raising the greatest expectations. It has to be borne in mind, however, that it is a strategic plan, a framework within which to improve the effectiveness of the UNCCD. Among the elements approved for its development are the responsibility given to CRIC 7 for reviewing the implementation of the plan and the mandate given to CST 9 to advise the CRIC on how best to measure progress in achieving the plan's strategic objectives. These objectives and their indicators, which are contained in the plan, are very wide-ranging: reducing the number of persons affected by desertification, reducing the total area of land affected by desertification, increasing the net productivity of the areas affected and increasing carbon reserves (soil and plant biomass) in these areas.

As regards the financing of the plan, the Secretariat has been requested to draw up a multiannual plan with a bi-annual programme of the additional costs entailed in fulfilling its obligations relating to the implementation of the plan.

The framework decision on the implementation of the Programme also makes detailed provision for improving coordination between the Secretariat and the Global Mechanism and calls on both executives to submit a joint work programme, based on results-based management and including indicators of successful cooperation, which will be the object of close attention and interest by the parties in the forthcoming meetings (CRIC 7 and COP 9). The decision further calls for an audit of the Global Mechanism by the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), primarily to assess its work and functions in accordance with the mandate issued by the Convention and the relevant COP decisions and to identify any unclear elements of its accounting and institutional agreements.

Committee on Science and Technology

In addition to the aspects highlighted in relation to the CST, COP 8 indicated as a priority area in its work programme for its next session "Monitoring and evaluation of the biophysical and socio-economic aspects of desertification and land degradation as a support for the taking of decisions concerning water and land management". This decision is of course significant and consistent with the orientation which it is intended to give to this Convention body so that it can supply indicators concerning desertification which can be applied in, and are of value for, management.

Civil Society

The important role played by civil society, and especially by the NGOs, is recognised and emphasised in the 10-year Strategic Plan and, more specifically, in the provisions laid down for its implementation, a section of which is devoted to it. The Spanish Government, which has from the outset been concerned to promote this role, also requested the inclusion of a new item in the Work Programme of the Ninth Conference of the Parties aiming at optimising the participation of civil society in the Convention's meetings and processes.

