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**Item 9 (c) of the provisional agenda
Other matters
Traditional knowledge**

**Towards the establishment of an international centre
on traditional knowledge in Italy**

I. Background information

1. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) attaches high relevance to traditional knowledge, with specific reference to the protection, promotion and use of traditional knowledge in combating desertification (article 18, paragraph 2, of the Convention).
2. Traditional knowledge is a standing item on the agenda of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST), and the Conference of the Parties (COP) has taken action on this matter since its first session. By its decision 14/COP.2, the COP requested the secretariat to complete its ongoing work on compiling the most widely applied traditional knowledge and to make a synthesis of this work available at the third session of the CST. This was considered as important because a wide range of traditional technologies have evolved through empirical experimentation by different communities in their bid to improve living conditions and the quality of life in drylands. By the same decision, the COP decided to appoint an ad hoc panel of experts to draw from the synthesis the most important and widely applied traditional knowledge; the panel was convened by Italy in July 1999.
3. By its decision 12/COP.3, the COP requested the secretariat to develop a closer working relationship with related institutions and to generate synergy through collaboration. By the same decision, the COP decided to appoint a second ad hoc panel of experts to develop further appropriate criteria to be used by national focal points:

(a) To measure and promote the reciprocity between traditional and modern knowledge;

(b) To assess how UNCCD networks and mechanisms are incorporating traditional knowledge in their work programmes;

(c) To assess the socio-economic and ecological benefits of traditional knowledge in the light of environmental changes.

4. The ad hoc panel of experts met in Italy in May 2000.

5. Parties have recognized the promotion and development of traditional knowledge as a reliable and environment-friendly tool for the implementation of the Convention since the inception of the UNCCD process. Based on its long-standing experience of national institutions in this field, the Government of Italy submitted to COP 5 a proposal for a “Pilot project of a network of institutions, bodies and experts on traditional knowledge”; this proposal is contained in document ICCD/COP(5)/CST/2.

6. By its decision 12/COP.5, the COP took note, with appreciation, of this proposal, and encouraged the Government of Italy to continue its work on traditional knowledge undertaken in collaboration with the other interested institutions. The COP also requested Parties, international organizations and institutions dealing with traditional knowledge, and the Global Mechanism (GM), to explore a partnership agreement to establish a network on traditional knowledge as proposed by the Government of Italy.

7. In the light of comments and observations made by Parties during the fifth session of the CST, a revised proposal was submitted by the Government of Italy regarding the establishment of networks on traditional knowledge within regional action programmes as a thematic programme networks (TPN) (ICCD/COP(6)/CST/4).

8. At its seventh session, the COP took note of the state of progress in the Iconographic System of Traditional Knowledge and Innovative Use (SITTI) presented at the concurrent session of the CST, and, by its decision 16/COP.7, encouraged Parties to develop initiatives on traditional knowledge in collaboration with other institutions and organizations.

II. Widening expertise and consolidating experience

9. It is against this enabling framework that the Government of Italy decided to increase the added value of the existing network of institutions and experts on traditional knowledge in terms of outreach, efficiency and visibility and to further emphasize its global dimension, and proposed to institutionalize the network within an intergovernmental set-up, through the establishment of an international centre on traditional knowledge.

10. This initiative aims at further developing international cooperation in the field of traditional knowledge and strengthening the implementation of multilateral sustainable development and environmental agreements.

11. The centre's mission would be to identify, study, assess, publicize, promote and protect traditional knowledge¹ worldwide, with the view to ensuring that traditional knowledge is fully integrated in land-use planning and implementation. The centre's activities would be based on a network of international experts and on the organization, implementation and maintenance of an innovative database on traditional knowledge.

12. On the occasion of the International Year of Desert and Desertification, the Government of Italy requested the secretariat to advise on legal and institutional requirements for the establishment of the centre and to facilitate a wide consultation process among Parties, international research centres, individual experts and other potential stakeholders.

13. To that effect, a cooperation agreement was signed in October 2006, between the Ministry of Environment, Territory and Sea of Italy and the UNCCD secretariat, in the framework of the activities of the Italian National Committee to Combat Drought and Desertification (NCCDD). IPOGEA, an Italian institution with long experience in the field of traditional knowledge,² was identified as a key technical and scientific partner. Additional support was received by the Regional Government of Tuscany, which has agreed to host the centre in a prestigious location in the city of Florence, and is providing office facilities and further assistance for its establishment.

14. Preliminary contacts were established with potential technical, scientific and financial partners in the implementation of this initiative, both bilateral and multilateral, in order to formulate joint operational programmes and strategic alliances. Among others, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) are considered as potential partners in the operations of the centre. UNESCO and IPOGEA have already developed an expert-prototype system on the Internet (www.tkwb.org), presenting a dynamic questionnaire based on the iconographic classification system of traditional knowledge, to guide the processes of identifying and classifying new knowledge.

¹ Traditional knowledge originates from people and is transmitted to people by recognizable and experienced actors. It is systemic (intersectoral and holistic), experimental (empirical and practical), handed down from generation to generation, and culturally enhanced. Accordingly, traditional knowledge as considered by the centre comprises the techniques and practices in common use on a territory for organizing soil management, use and protection of natural areas, rural and monumental architecture and urban centers. Knowledge relating to living organism and genomes are excluded from the areas of operation of the centre given the sensitive issue of economic speculation and piracy.

² IPOGEA has been instrumental in providing scientific and technical backstopping since the inception of this process. It has assisted in convening the two meetings of the UNCCD ad hoc panels of experts in traditional knowledge, and has a long-standing cooperation with a number of international research centres operating in this field. IPOGEA is presently carrying out two network projects – one with the European Commission (RESOURCENET) on the use of traditional knowledge for a correct exploitation of natural resources, and the other with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), on the use of traditional knowledge for security in the Mediterranean area.

15. As second step in this consultation process, an expert meeting was convened in June 2007 in Florence, Italy, with the aim of:

(a) Consolidating the international network of institutions and experts on traditional knowledge;

(b) Reviewing operational and institutional strategies leading to the establishment of the centre.

16. The meeting was attended by 80 participants from 15 country Parties to the UNCCD³ and six United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations.⁴

III. Conclusions and recommendations

17. In accordance with the mandate given by decisions 12/COP.5 and 16/COP.7, it has been decided to transmit the conclusions and recommendations of the Florence expert meeting to the COP at its eighth session for consideration and action as appropriate.

18. The participants to the Florence expert meeting recommended addressing issues relating to the establishment of the centre through a consultation process, with the view to assessing:

(a) Ways and means of cooperation among different stakeholders involved in this field, including definition of areas of collaboration between members and added value of networking;

(b) The scope of the centre, which would include research, technical assistance, information dissemination, education, training activities and field programmes;

(c) The objectives and functions of the centre, which would include advising intergovernmental environmental treaties, primarily the UNCCD, and national governments with the view to having impacts on national legislations and global policies;

(d) The status and membership of the centre, which should allow for wide scientific autonomy and international relevance, under the rules and regulations applying to bodies with international status.

19. Such a consultation process should be undertaken through the existing network on traditional knowledge, should be as wide as possible and should include not only country Parties but all stakeholders, governmental and non-governmental institutions, individual experts and civil society.

³ Algeria, Canada, Chile, Cuba, Egypt, Germany, Japan, Italy, Mexico, Morocco, Niger, Senegal, Spain, Switzerland and Tunisia.

⁴ European University Institute (EUI), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), UNCCD, UNESCO and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

20. The participants also recommended that the secretariat facilitate this process, including consolidating and ensuring the required facilities for the traditional knowledge network to operate, and giving the required institutional advice, with the support of the Government of Italy and the Regional Government of Tuscany, in cooperation with IPOGEA.

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