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Follow-up to the outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development relevant to the Convention and preparation of the sixteenth and seventeenth sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development

**Follow-up to the outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development
relevant to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification,
and preparation of the sixteenth and seventeenth sessions
of the Commission on Sustainable Development**

Note by the secretariat*

Summary

In the context of the follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Conference of the Parties (COP) invited Parties, the Executive Secretary and other relevant stakeholders to actively prepare for and participate in the fourteenth and fifteenth sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-14 and CSD-15), with a view to demonstrating that the development and promotion of new and renewable energy sources in drylands constitutes a critical sustainable development issue, and that the implementation of UNCCD action programmes can make a major contribution in this context. The participation of the secretariat in CSD-14 and CSD-15 is reported in this document.

Recognizing the importance of CSD-16 and CSD-17 to strengthening international awareness of and commitment to the implementation of the Convention, and the need for timely and substantive preparations for UNCCD input to this process, the COP decided to add an item on preparations for CSD-16 and CSD-17 to the agenda of its eighth session, and requested the Executive Secretary to prepare a background paper; that paper is presented in document ICCD/COP(8)/5/Add.1.

* The submission of this document was delayed due to the short time available between the fifth session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention and the eighth session of the Conference of the Parties.

The COP may wish to provide guidance on how and the extent to which the review session (CSD-16) and the policy session (CSD-17) should address these issues, including provisions to enable the secretariat of the Convention to carry out related activities.

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I. Mandate

1. The Conference of the Parties (COP), by its decision 2/COP.7, in the context of the follow-up to the outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), underlined the potential of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) as a tool for meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in particular the goal to halve extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. It invited Parties, the Executive Secretary and other relevant stakeholders to actively prepare for and participate in the fourteenth and fifteenth sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-14 and CSD-15), with a view to demonstrating that the development and promotion of new and renewable energy sources in drylands constitutes a critical sustainable development issue; and that the implementation of UNCCD action programmes can make a significant contribution in this context.

2. The COP, recognizing the importance of CSD-16 and CSD-17 to strengthening international awareness of and commitment to the implementation of the Convention by their thematic focus on agriculture, rural development, land, drought and desertification, and the need for timely and substantive preparations for the input of the UNCCD to this process, decided to add an item on the preparations for CSD-16 and CSD-17 to the agenda of its eighth session, and requested the Executive Secretary to prepare a background paper, drawing in particular on the outcomes of the third and fifth sessions of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC). The paper prepared in response to that request is presented in document ICCD/COP(8)/5/Add.1.

II. Background information

3. The outcomes of the WSSD relevant to the UNCCD included the acknowledgement of the Convention as one of the tools for poverty eradication. They also included recognition of the need to carry out action at all levels to strengthen implementation of the UNCCD through, inter alia, the mobilization of adequate and predictable financial resources, transfer of technologies and capacity-building, formulation of national action programmes, exploration and enhancement of synergies between the three Rio conventions, and integration of measures to prevent and combat desertification as well as to mitigate the effects of drought through relevant policies and programmes, provision of affordable local access to information to improve monitoring and early warning relating to desertification and drought, and improvement of the sustainability of grassland resources through strengthening management and law enforcement.

4. At the 2005 United Nations Summit held in New York, world leaders committed to address causes of desertification and land degradation, as well as poverty resulting from land degradation, in the process of the implementation of the Convention, including mobilizing adequate and predictable financial resources.

5. Since the WSSD, the COP has adopted decisions 2/COP.6 and 2/COP.7 on the follow-up to its outcome. Both decisions have contributed to strengthening the Convention's profile in the proceedings of relevant intergovernmental processes, in particular the deliberations of the CSD-14 and CSD-15.

III. Participation in the fourteenth and fifteenth sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development

6. Pursuant to the mandate given in decision 2/COP.7, the secretariat participated in CSD-14 and CSD-15 and addressed their ministerial segments.

A. The fourteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development

7. CSD-14 took place at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 1 to 12 May 2006. As a review session, CSD-14 was tasked with identifying barriers and constraints, lessons learned and best practices in implementation in the thematic cluster of energy for sustainable development, industrial development, air pollution/atmosphere and climate change.

8. The Executive Secretary participated in that session and addressed its high-level segment on 11 May 2006. In his address, the Executive Secretary emphasized the need to enhance efforts to develop and promote new and renewable energy sources, which are closely associated with the fight against desertification and with poverty eradication. He observed that energy sources were at the centre of natural resource degradation in many rural areas of countries affected by desertification.

9. The Executive Secretary singled out the over-dependence of rural communities on fuelwood to meet their energy requirements, thus contributing to deforestation, which in turn leads to soil erosion, land degradation and water shortages through the silting of water sources, rivers and dams. He drew the attention of the participants to the fact that because sustainable energy was an important factor in socio-economic development, the potential for renewable sources should be explored further in order to offer alternatives to conventional energy sources, and that renewable energy was a strategic area that could not be separated from combating desertification and poverty eradication.

10. The Executive Secretary reiterated that it was envisaged that the development and promotion of the utilization of sustainable energy sources would represent additional and essential processes by which the biological and economic potential of arid and semi-arid areas may be conserved and improved. He added that the benefits to be accrued from developing sustainable energy sources included stemming the depletion of forest resources and control of the resultant land degradation, and that, in areas affected by drought and desertification, the provision of sustainable energy sources would contribute to increased economic opportunity and reduce ecological stress on dryland ecosystems.

B. The fifteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development

11. CSD-15 took place in New York from 30 April to 11 May 2007. The Deputy Executive Secretary attended the session and participated in the ministerial dialogue with organizations of the United Nations system and other relevant international organizations. Whereas the secretariat's address to CSD-14 focused on the link between energy sources and the fight against desertification, the presentation made at CSD-15 dwelled on the nexus between the implementation of the Convention and adaptation to climate change.

12. The Deputy Executive Secretary drew the attention of the session to the fact that climate change was now seen as having a profound impact on ecosystems and societies, challenging some basic assumptions concerning the reliability of the production and consumption patterns of our emerging global civilization. He noted that because local populations had no choice but to scratch a living from increasingly scarce natural resources, the challenge was to meet their requirements for sustainable livelihoods while combating desertification in a manner that was adaptive to climate change. He added that such key areas as science and education, agriculture, forestry, rangeland management, sustainable energy and supply and management of water resources represented platforms for synergistic efforts to meet this challenge.

13. The Deputy Executive Secretary mentioned that the links between climate change and desertification suggested that mitigation and adaptation strategies should be designed and coordinated to address aspects of both processes through participatory and synergistic programmes in local areas. He reaffirmed that for most developing countries, adaptation to climate change involved the protection of land against further degradation, which in turn strengthened the resilience of ecosystems.

14. The Deputy Executive Secretary called on all stakeholders to address climate change through effective implementation of the UNCCD in a way that ensures land cover through forestry/agro-forestry activities, and water and soil conservation.

IV. Preparation for the sixteenth and seventeenth sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development

15. Decision 2/COP.7 requested the Executive Secretary to prepare a background paper in preparation for the participation of the UNCCD in CSD-16 and CSD-17, drawing in particular on the outcomes of CRIC 3 and CRIC 5.

16. General Assembly resolution 61/202 underlined the importance of the issue of desertification in the process of the CSD, in particular in the context of CSD-16 and CSD-17 dealing with thematic clusters on agriculture, rural development, land, drought and desertification. The resolution requested the secretariat of the CSD to work closely with the secretariat of the UNCCD on the preparations for those two sessions in areas relevant to the Convention.

17. Consistent with the mandate received from the COP and the General Assembly, the secretariats of the UNCCD and the CSD met to discuss modalities for collaboration in undertaking preparations for the next cycle of the CSD. The meeting took place in New York during CSD-15. At that meeting, the secretariats underlined the multisectoral and cross-cutting nature of the thematic clusters. They noted the need for information sharing in order to produce streamlined documents based on various information sources. They reached an understanding that they needed to join forces to respond to various demands from Member States and other stakeholders. In this respect, they agreed to find opportunities for joint intersessional panels and side-events with appropriate themes such as desertification and poverty reduction, natural resource scarcity in the drylands as a strategic issue, sustainable land management, and adaptation to climate change.

18. Special reference was made to regional implementation meetings of the CSD as well as to meetings of regional economic commissions. Because the implementation framework of the UNCCD follows a regional pattern, it was understood that the secretariat of the Convention would actively contribute to the proceedings of those meetings.

V. Conclusion and recommendations

19. The CSD, at its eleventh session, decided that its multiyear programme of work beyond 2003 would be organized on the basis of seven two-year cycles, with each cycle focusing on selected thematic clusters of issues.

20. The thematic focus of the current two-year cycle (2006–2007) has been on energy for sustainable development and climate change. Through its participation in the respective sessions, the secretariat has sought to demonstrate that the development and promotion of new and renewable energy sources in drylands constitutes a critical sustainable development issue; and that the implementation of UNCCD action programmes can make a major contribution in this context.

21. For the coming two-year period (2008–2009) it was decided that CSD sessions should focus on agriculture, rural development, land, drought and desertification, and on Africa. This thematic cluster addresses the core of the UNCCD and constitutes an opportunity to strengthen the position of desertification and drought on the international stage. The COP may wish to act on the recommendations contained in document ICCD/COP(8)/5/Add.1.

22. Since identifying the Convention as one of the tools to address poverty and hence to contribute to achieving the MDGs, the international community has resolved to strengthen its implementation. For two consecutive years, in 2008 and 2009, core issues of the Convention will be addressed by the CSD. The COP may wish to provide guidance on how and the extent to which the review session (CSD-16) and the policy session (CSD-17) should address these issues, including provisions to enable the secretariat of the Convention to carry out related activities.
