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Relations between the secretariat and its host country

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Note by the secretariat*

Summary

1. By its decision 29/COP.7, the Conference of the Parties (COP) requested the secretariat to continue developing its relations with the Government of Germany, the State of North Rhine-Westphalia and the City of Bonn, as well as with academia and the private sector.
2. This document has been prepared based on activities undertaken in the Host country of the secretariat of the Convention, and in close collaboration with official counterparts and various German partners.
3. The COP at its eighth session may wish to consider the report on relations between the secretariat and its host country and give advice as appropriate.

* The submission of this document was delayed because of the limited 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.

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I. Introduction

1. By its decision 29/COP.7, the Conference of the Parties (COP) requested the secretariat to continue developing its relations with the Government of Germany, the State of North Rhine-Westphalia and the City of Bonn, as well as with academia and the private sector, and to report to the COP at its eighth session on further progress made in its relations with the host country.
2. This document provides up to date information on the working relationship between the secretariat and its host country and other actors mentioned in decision 29/COP.7.
3. This document also provides information on the functioning of the United Nations Campus in Bonn and arrangements made by the host country and the Bonn-based United Nations organizations on sharing the cost of these facilities.

II. Information on activities undertaken between November 2005 and June 2007

A. Collaboration with the German authorities

4. In the period between November 2005 and June 2007 the secretariat continued to work closely with the relevant authorities of Germany. Many consultative meetings were held on the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and joint activities were undertaken.

1. Collaboration with the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development

5. The Parliamentary State Secretary of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) of Germany and the Executive Secretary of the UNCCD had several consultations – in January, February and October 2006 – in Bonn and Berlin, Germany. Various policy issues were addressed during these consultations, including on implementation of national action programmes, the celebration of the International Year of Deserts and Desertification (IYDD), the financial situation of the Convention, and the inclusion of desertification and poverty eradication among the areas to be addressed during the German presidency of the European Union.

6. At these meetings the Government of Germany further reiterated its readiness to support UNCCD activities, including through the cooperation with international organizations such as the World Bank, regional development banks, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and other United Nations specialized agencies.

7. BMZ hosted two meetings of the Intergovernmental Intersessional Working Group (IIWG) on strategy development for the UNCCD. These meetings were held in Bonn in May and July 2006, in close collaboration with the secretariat.

2. Cooperation with other ministries

8. The secretariat has maintained active working relationships with other ministries, including the Federal Ministry of Environment, the Federal Ministry for Research and Education, and the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The secretariat and the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs together organized a conference on “Desertification and security” in Berlin in June 2007.

3. Collaboration with the Credit Institution for Reconstruction

9. The Credit Institution for Reconstruction (KFW), as the most important German development bank, has strategic partnership arrangements with several affected developing countries, including 22 countries in Africa. Rural development issues, including land degradation, are among the key sectoral areas in which KFW is actively involved.

10. KFW has expressed its interest in promoting economic investments in dryland areas. A consultative meeting between KFW and the secretariat is scheduled towards the end of 2007, with the aim of exploring possibilities for collaboration in the context of the UNCCD implementation processes.

4. Cooperation with the Parliament of the Federal Republic of Germany

11. The secretariat has a long-standing cooperative relationship with the German Parliament. The President of the Commission for Economic Cooperation and Development of the German Parliament and the Executive Secretary met in Berlin in October 2006. In their exchanges, they recognized that rural areas of affected developing countries, where more than 80 per cent of the poor live, deserve more attention. Among the areas where policymakers should concentrate their efforts, they discussed economic investments in dryland areas, promotion of renewable energy sources, and synergy among the Rio conventions. They also agreed that support to projects on poverty eradication should take into account the specific situation of those developing countries affected by recurrent droughts and desertification.

12. In this context, the Executive Secretary addressed the twenty-second session of the Commission for Economic Cooperation and Development in Berlin in October 2006, and stressed the role of parliaments in promoting the UNCCD process.

5. Cooperation with regional and local governments and other partners

13. In accordance with decision 29/COP7 the secretariat has continued to develop its relationship with the Government of the Federal State of North-Rhine Westphalia. Important investments were made by the regional government in the renovation of the Langer Eugen (the building which now houses the United Nations organization in Bonn) and construction of the United Nations Campus.

14. An awareness-raising activity entitled “Bonn Desert Day” was launched on the occasion of the IYDD, under the patronage of the Mayor of Bonn. BMZ and the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, GTZ) also

contributed to the preparation and organization of this initiative. Activities included presentations, given in the former House of Parliament, on land degradation and desertification, challenges and possible solutions; and a photographic exhibition on the theme “Deserts of the world”. Large number of the general public, as well as specialized institutions, took part in this event.

15. In parallel with Bonn Desert Day, a panel discussion was organized at the headquarters of Deutsche Welle with the participation of internationally recognized experts on desertification issues.

16. The secretariat has continued to strengthen its cooperation with other local governments of Germany. In November 2006 the Executive Secretary met the President of the Parliament of the Federal State of Baden-Württemberg and the Mayor of Stuttgart. Among the issues they discussed were the possibility of making use of Stuttgart’s expertise and know-how in the field of integrated water management, the problem of migration as one of the effects of desertification, and the need to support synergy at country level among the Rio conventions.

17. Cooperation between the secretariat and the City of Hamburg has also grown, especially through the Dryland Research Centre Hamburg (DRCH), which is involved in research projects aimed at improving the potential of drylands, including in the area of desertification and adaptation to climate change. DRCH works closely with other networks, including some located in Africa, and has developed a “Dryland Observation System”. DRCH hosts the secretariats of Desert*Net Germany and the newly established European DesertNet. DRCH is also cooperation with the Max Planck Institute, in Hamburg.

18. The Free State of Bavaria is also supportive of UNCCD activities. An exhibition on deserts and drylands was organized in Rosenheim, in the context of the IYDD. The Environment Science Centre of the University of Augsburg is involved in research and studies on management of water resources and energy sources.

19. Other major partners in Germany include foundations involved in cooperation for development and fighting poverty. The secretariat has established working collaboration with, and participated in events organized by, the Friedrich Ebert and the Konrad Adenauer foundations. In May 2007 the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, in cooperation with BMZ and GTZ, and in association with the secretariat, organized an international conference in Brussels on the role of governance in combating desertification. Stakeholders attending this event included representatives of European Union (EU) Member States; representatives of the Africa, Pacific and Caribbean Group of States, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society.

B. Activities during the International Year of Deserts and Desertification

20. The secretariat carried out several activities in various locations throughout Germany in the context of the IYDD, including discussions, conferences and exhibitions, in cooperation with national and local authorities.

21. The International Day to Combat Desertification (17 June) was celebrated in Bonn in cooperation with Deutsche Welle, the City of Bonn, and BMZ. Press conference and interviews

were organized, and the secretariat was associated with presentations on the Convention at several workshops, seminars and scientific conferences. All these events were covered by the German media through radio and television features, thus contributing to disseminating information on the goals and objectives of the Convention.

22. An international conference for journalists specialized in the field of sustainable development and combating desertification was organized in December 2006; the secretariat participated in this event.

23. Many German partners were particularly active in public information during 2006, and prepared information and training material including specifically dedicated websites and teaching kits for schools. Many of these efforts were supported by BMZ and GTZ.

C. Collaboration with the scientific community

24. The secretariat participated in lectures and discussions at various seminars and interactive dialogues organized by the German academic community.

25. Cooperation with the University of Bonn has grown considerably in the period under review. At the beginning of 2006, the Executive Secretary and the Dean of the university agreed to strengthen their collaboration and established a joint steering committee entrusted with developing a platform of collaboration between the two institutions and ensuring coordination of activities. As a result, a joint workshop was organized in Bonn in November 2006 at which a comprehensive framework of collaboration between the secretariat and the University of Bonn was designed.

26. The secretariat continues to develop its working collaboration with other German scientific institutions. These include cooperation with the association "Desert*Net Germany", whose aim is to developing scientific knowledge on desertification. In cooperation with this association, a conference on soil and desertification was held in Hamburg in May 2006. The association also organized a meeting of Diversitas Germany on the occasion of the United Nations Day of Biodiversity (22 May 2006), and the first meeting of the European DesertNet in October 2006, both at the UNCCD premises.

27. The secretariat also participated in a scientific conference organized by the University of Trier in September 2005, on "Remote sensing and geo-information processing in the assessment and monitoring of land degradation and desertification".

28. The Executive Secretary made a presentation on activities of the Convention at the University of Hohenheim in December 2006, within the framework of activities to promote the use of renewable energy sources and the development of biofuel.

D. Collaboration with the private sector

29. Relations with the private sector of Germany, including financial institutions, are also developing towards expected constructive cooperation. The initiatives developed in cooperation with the business community have encompassed:

- (a) Research programmes on renewable sources of energy, including biofuel;
- (b) Workshops on dryland ecosystems and risk of land degradation and desertification;
- (c) Studies on the use of recycled water in agriculture.

30. A private banking group has recently expressed interest in supporting development projects in desertification-prone areas, through its development assistance foundation. The secretariat is engaged in analysing the modalities for affected developing countries and community-based organizations to access such funding opportunities.

III. Functioning of the United Nations Campus in Bonn

31. The secretariat of the UNCCD moved to the United Nations Campus in Bonn in June 2006 together with other United Nations organizations. The Government of Germany fully financed and facilitated the move.

32. The new complex currently houses the offices of 12 United Nations organizations, most of them specialized in the areas of environment and sustainable development, and will later include the Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and a new Bonn International Conference Center at the United Nations Campus.

33. The new United Nations Campus was inaugurated on 11 July 2006 by the then Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, and the German Chancellor, Ms. Angela Merkel. On the occasion of this official ceremony the political authorities of Germany reiterated the importance of the United Nations organizations based in Bonn as a centre for environment and sustainable development and the Secretary General praised the German support and committed hospitality to the United Nations.

34. As the Premises Agreement between the Government of Germany and the United Nations had not been finalized before the scheduled move dates, the relocation of the various United Nations organizations in Bonn was based on an exchange of letters between the two parties, while awaiting the finalization of the negotiations on the Premises Agreement. Given the high operating costs of the new premises, the Government of Germany agreed that the United Nations organizations in Bonn would pay a lump sum amount for the operational costs until 31 December 2009, with the Government of Germany continuing to pay most of the costs and take responsibility for maintaining and operating the building. By 31 December 2009 new arrangements will have been negotiated between the Government of Germany and the United Nations organizations in Bonn. These negotiations should be initiated no later than January 2008 and concluded before the end of September 2008.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

35. After consideration of the present document, the COP at its eighth session may wish:

(a) To note with appreciation the excellent level of collaboration between the secretariat and its host country, academia, the private sector, the State of North Rhine-Westphalia and the City of Bonn;

(b) To encourage the Government of Germany to continue to play its supportive role in the UNCCD implementation processes and to consider strengthening the role of the designated focal point through the setting up of a national coordinating body, which will involve relevant stakeholders active in the Convention processes.

(c) To request the secretariat to continue to report to the COP on forthcoming administrative arrangements.
