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United Nations Conference on Desertification

Report of the Secretary-General

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## I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report is submitted in accordance with paragraph 8 of General Assembly resolution 31/108 of 16 December 1976, in which the Secretary-General was requested to report on the results of the United Nations Conference on Desertification through the Economic and Social Council to the Assembly at its thirty-second session.
2. The Conference took place at Nairobi from 29 August to 9 September 1977. Representatives of 95 States, invited in accordance with paragraph 3 (a) of General Assembly resolution 31/108, took part in the Conference (see A/CONF.74/36, chap. IV).
3. Representatives of the United Nations Council for Namibia and of organizations that have received a standing invitation from the General Assembly to participate as observers in the sessions and work of all international conferences convened under its auspices took part in the Conference, in accordance with paragraphs 3 (b) to 3 (g) of General Assembly resolution 31/108, as well as representatives of national liberation movements recognized in its region by the Organization of African Unity, representatives of the specialized agencies and of interested United Nations organs, and observers from other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.
4. The Conference adopted the agenda that had been approved by the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme at its fourth session (UNEP/GC/67/Add.1), after having amended certain rules and added a number of new rules (A/CONF.74/Rules/Rev.1). It also decided to set a time-limit for statements in the plenary and to waive the requirement of secret ballot in the election of officers.
5. In response to the request contained in paragraph 4 of General Assembly resolution 3337 (XXIX) of 17 December 1974, 1/ the Secretary-General submitted to the Conference the following principal documents for consideration under items 4 and 5 of the provisional agenda 2/ of the Conference:

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1/ In paragraph 4 of the resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General, in co-operation with the United Nations bodies concerned and with the assistance of an ad hoc interagency task force:

- (a) To prepare a world map of areas affected and areas likely to be affected by the process of desertification;
- (b) To assess all available data on desertification and its consequences on the development process of the countries affected;
- (c) To prepare an effective, comprehensive and co-ordinated action programme against desertification, including the building up of indigenous and autonomous science and technology.

2/ "Processes and causes of desertification" (item 4) and "Plan of Action to Combat Desertification" (item 5).

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- (a) "Desertification: an overview" (A/CONF.74/1/Rev.1); 3/
- (b) "Synthesis of case studies of desertification" (A/CONF.74/4 and Corr.1);
- (c) "World map of desertification", with explanatory brochure (A/CONF.74/2); 4/
- (d) "Draft plan of action to combat desertification" (A/CONF.74/3 and Corr.1), together with a summary of the feasibility studies of transnational projects (A/CONF.74/3/Add.1 and Corr.1) 5/ and a brief analysis of the economic and financial aspects of the Plan of Action (A/CONF.74/3/Add.2 and Corr.1 and 2).

6. The following background documents were also made available to the Conference:

- (a) Four component reviews: "Climate and desertification" (A/CONF.74/5); "Technology and desertification" (A/CONF.74/6 and Corr.1 and 2); "Ecological change and desertification" (A/CONF.74/7); and "Population, society and desertification" (A/CONF.74/8);
- (b) Fifteen case studies of the process of desertification in various countries of the world, including six case studies prepared with the assistance of UNESCO and UNDP (A/CONF.74/9-14/Add.1) and nine associated case studies contributed by six States (A/CONF.74/15-23); 6/
- (c) Six feasibility studies of transnational projects (A/CONF.74/24-29);
- (d) "Decisions of the United Nations Water Conference relevant to the work of the United Nations Conference on Desertification: report by the secretariat of the Water Conference" (A/CONF.74/30);
- (e) Innovative maps on world desertification (with explanatory brochure): one based on a climate aridity index, one representing aridity and drought probability and the third depicting the status of desertification in hot arid regions (A/CONF.74/31);

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3/ This document summarizes, *inter alia*, the findings and conclusions of 4 component reviews and 15 case studies (see para. 6, documents A/CONF.74/5-8 and A/CONF.74/9-23, respectively).

4/ Additionally, three innovative maps on world desertification, also with explanatory brochure, were submitted to the Conference as background documents (see para. 6, document A/CONF.74/31). Also, a desertification map of Africa north of the equator and one of South America were displayed at the Conference.

5/ The feasibility studies themselves were submitted to the Conference as background documents (see following paragraph, documents A/CONF.74/24-29).

6/ To facilitate access to the case studies, they were synthesized in one of the principal documents of the Conference (see para. 5 above, document A/CONF.74/4).

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- (f) "Current international activities to combat desertification" (A/CONF.74/32);
- (g) Reports of the regional preparatory meetings (A/CONF.74/33 and Add.1);
- (h) "Study of alternative economic strategies for the development of arid and semi-arid lands" (A/CONF.74/34). 7/

7. The report of the Conference (A/CONF.74/36) records the action taken and gives a brief account of its constitution and proceedings. The action taken by the Conference comprises the adoption of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification and eight resolutions (see A/CONF.74/36, chaps. I and II). These are briefly described in paragraphs 9 to 37 below.

## II. RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. World map of desertification

8. The Conference accepted the World map of desertification prepared in response to a request of the General Assembly (see para. 5 above and foot-note 1) as a first approximation primarily intended to indicate the global magnitude of the problem. Recognizing the inevitable limitations which the map in its first form contained, the Conference recommended that the production of detailed maps at larger scales, using the same or other appropriate legends and taking into account the views of the Conference regarding the scope of desertification (see A/CONF.74/36, chap. I, para. 7, and annex I, paras. 14-17), should be encouraged, as well as the production of other accompanying maps, for example, of areas liable to salinization, alkalinization, hydrological quandary, seasonal drought etc. (see also para. 26 below).

### B. Plan of Action to Combat Desertification

9. One of the principal objectives of the General Assembly in convening the Conference was to provide the international community with the basis for launching an effective, comprehensive and co-ordinated action programme with a view to resolving the problems of desertification (General Assembly resolution 3337 (XXIX), last preambular para. and para. 4 (c)). The Plan of Action to Combat Desertification which the Conference adopted in accordance with this directive, on the basis of a draft Plan of Action (see para. 5 above) and the amendments thereto submitted at the Conference, presents a set of 28 interrelated recommendations for initiating and sustaining a co-operative effort on the scale required to combat desertification. Together, these recommendations aim at reinforcing and integrating national, regional and global international actions against desertification that are currently being taken both within and outside the United Nations system.

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7/ Forms part of the study series on the future carried out by UNITAR.

10. The recommendations of the Plan of Action 8/ are divided into four chapters entitled, respectively, "Recommendations for national and regional action" (chap. IV), "Recommendations for international action and co-operation" (chap. V), "Recommendations for immediate initial action" (chap. VI) and "Recommendations for implementation of the Plan" (chap. VII).

C. Recommendations for national and regional action  
(recommendations 1-22)

11. Chapter I, section IV of the report (A/CONF.74/36) includes 22 recommendations covering assessing and monitoring, corrective anti-desertification measures, socio-economic measures, public participation and strengthening of science and technology. After each recommendation, the measures required at the national and regional levels to carry out the recommendations are indicated.

12. The General Assembly may wish to take note of these recommendations and commend them to Governments and the appropriate regional organizations for necessary action.

D. Recommendations for international action and co-operation  
(recommendations 23-26)

13. The recommendations in chapter I, section V of the report are aimed at enlisting the aid of the United Nations bodies and specialized agencies concerned in implementing the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification (recommendation 23); at supporting the activities directed at understanding and resolving climate problems, initiated by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in association with other organizations (recommendation 24); at encouraging participation of governmental and non-governmental organizations outside the United Nations system in the implementation of the Plan of Action (recommendation 25); and at promoting co-operation among countries of a region in the management of shared water resources (recommendation 26).

14. The General Assembly may wish to consider taking the action called for in these recommendations.

E. Recommendations for immediate initial action

15. The Conference further recommended (A/CONF.74/36, chap. I, sect. VI) that a number of actions at the national, regional and international levels be taken immediately following the adoption by the Conference of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification and its endorsement by the General Assembly.

16. The General Assembly may wish to consider endorsing the recommendations for

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8/ All recommendations were adopted by consensus.

immediate action at the national level and commending them to the attention of Governments.

17. Among the initial measures to be taken at the regional level, the Conference recommended the convening by the regional commissions, in co-operation with interested Governments and regional organizations, of technical workshops or seminars to discuss the implementation of the United Nations Plan of Action at the regional level; the holding of interregional consultations on selecting sites for the establishment of new regional anti-desertification research and training centres, and the organizing and co-ordinating of the implementation of transnational projects, such as those outlined in the feasibility studies (see para. 6 (c) above).

18. The Economic and Social Council may wish to endorse this recommendation and draw it to the attention of the regional commissions for appropriate action.

F. Recommendations for implementation of the Plan of Action  
(recommendations 27-28)

19. The recommendations in chapter I, section VII of the report (A/CONF.74/36) set forth the institutional and financial arrangements proposed for following up the implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification. In this respect, the Conference agreed that no new institution in the United Nations system was needed to carry out this task. It recommended that UNEP (Governing Council, Environment Co-ordination Board and Executive Director) should be responsible for following up and co-ordinating the implementation of the Plan of Action; further, that the regional commissions should have responsibility for co-ordinating, catalysing and executing, in accordance with their terms of reference, intra-regional anti-desertification programmes adopted by the Member States concerned; and that for this purpose the regional commissions should actively participate in the Environment Co-ordination Board (recommendation 27).

20. To assist the Environment Co-ordination Board in carrying out its task of ensuring co-operation and co-ordination among all organizations and bodies of the United Nations system concerned with the implementation of the Plan of Action, the Conference further recommended that the Board establish a working group on desertification consisting of a small number of highly qualified officers from appropriate United Nations agencies and bodies; and that the Executive Director of UNEP and the Environment Co-ordination Board, to enable them to carry out their tasks, be serviced by a very small number of highly qualified staff, who would be clearly identifiable within the UNEP secretariat and would be drawn from the various United Nations agencies and bodies concerned. Inasmuch as the work arising from the Plan of Action is a responsibility of the United Nations system as a whole and affects projects and programmes of a number of United Nations bodies and agencies, it was considered that the activities of the very small group might be financed from the existing budgets of the United Nations bodies and agencies concerned.

21. The Conference also recommended that the regional commissions, in carrying out their tasks, should work in close contact with the regional offices of UNEP, as well

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as with governmental and non-governmental organizations and institutions at the national and regional level concerned with combating desertification.

22. The General Assembly may wish to endorse these recommendations and request the regional commissions, through the Economic and Social Council, and UNEP to take the necessary action to implement them. Furthermore, the Assembly may wish to invite other United Nations bodies and the specialized agencies concerned to assist, for their part, in the implementation of these recommendations.

23. The Conference recommended the following arrangements and methods of financing the implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification (recommendation 28):

(a) Subregional co-operation. Where required, subregional co-operation should be initiated or intensified among groups of countries affected by desertification, with a view to formulating joint programmes and development assistance requests. The United Nations Environment Programme should assist such subregional groups with technical expertise and relate their proposed programmes to the implementation of the global Plan of Action.

(b) Bilateral, multilateral and multibilateral assistance. Developing countries should give due priority to desertification problems in their development assistance requests, and the financial institutions within the United Nations system, as well as multilateral and bilateral donors outside the system, should allocate part of their resources to financing activities advocated in the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification.

(c) Consultative group/club or group-type financing. The Executive Director of UNEP should convene, immediately after the endorsement by the General Assembly of the Plan of Action, a consultative group comprising representatives of the United Nations agencies and bodies concerned and from such other organizations as might be required, including major donors, both traditional and new, and multilateral financing agencies, as well as representatives from developing countries having a substantial interest in combating desertification. The group would assist in the co-ordination of activities undertaken with the resources mobilized by it. It would be serviced by the staff referred to in paragraph 20 above.

(d) Special account. The Conference invited the General Assembly to take the necessary steps for the creation, at the global level within the United Nations, of a special account for implementing the Plan of Action, which should draw its resources from, inter alia, contributions from Member States, international taxation, donations, multilateral financing institutions and interest-free loans.

(e) Additional measures. The Conference further invited the General Assembly to request the Governing Council of UNEP to have prepared, by a small group of high-level specialists in international financing of projects and programmes, a study of additional measures and means of financing the implementation of the Plan of Action, such as funds-in-trust, fiscal measures entailing automaticity and an international fund, and to submit a final report on the subject, through the Economic and Social Council, to the Assembly at its thirty-third session.

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24. The General Assembly may wish to endorse these recommendations and to commend the arrangements outlined in subparagraphs (a) to (c) above to the attention of the Governments and organizations concerned, in particular UNEP, for appropriate action. The Assembly may also wish to consider taking the actions suggested in paragraphs (d) and (e) of recommendation 28.

### III. RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED BY THE CONFERENCE 9/

#### Resolution 1. Implementation of General Assembly resolution 3337 (XXIX)

25. In section I of resolution 1 of 9 September 1977, the Conference recommended that the General Assembly should request the Secretary-General to transmit the documentation prepared for the Conference in compliance with paragraph 4 (b) of General Assembly resolution 3337 (XXIX) to the organizations and bodies concerned within the United Nations system, as well as to the relevant scientific institutions outside the system, both governmental and non-governmental, for further research and development of the data, to close any existing gaps in scientific knowledge and technology, having regard in particular to the necessity of building up indigenous and autonomous science and technology capacity in the areas concerned.

26. In section II of the same resolution, the Conference recommended that the General Assembly should request the Secretary-General to transmit the world map of desertification (see para. 8 above) to Member States and to the competent organizations and bodies within the United Nations system, as well as to the scientific institutions concerned outside the system, both governmental and non-governmental, for further development of the map on the basis of the relevant recommendations of the Conference and taking into account the technical comments made thereon at the Conference (see A/CONF.74/36, annex I, paras. 21 and 20).

27. In section III of resolution 1, the Conference approved the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification as a whole and commended the recommendations of the Plan of Action for appropriate action to all Governments, the General Assembly and all organizations and bodies within the United Nations system, as well as to other concerned regional and international governmental and non-governmental organizations; and strongly urged that the necessary financial and other resources to implement these recommendations be made available.

28. The General Assembly may wish to consider taking the action recommended in sections I to III of this resolution.

#### Resolution 2. Financial and technical assistance to the least developed countries

29. In resolution 2 of 9 September 1977, the Conference, recognizing that the

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9/ All but resolution 7 were adopted by consensus.

least developed countries with limited resources at their disposal were in need of immediate financial and technical assistance from the United Nations, the specialized agencies and other international organizations, urged the United Nations, the specialized agencies and international and regional financial institutions to extend, in addition to current multilateral and bilateral assistance, appropriate technical and financial assistance to the least developed countries for the development of their natural resources and to enable them to combat desertification effectively; and recommended to the General Assembly that it should request the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of the present resolution to the Assembly at its thirty-third session.

30. The General Assembly may wish to consider taking action on the lines suggested in resolution 2.

Resolution 3. Drought in the Sahelian countries

31. In resolution 3 of 8 September 1977, the Conference, considering that a lasting solution must be found to the drought problems of the Sahelian countries, drew the attention of the international community to the critical situation prevailing throughout the Sahelian region; recommended increased aid to all Sahelian countries once again stricken by drought; and recommended that, in view of the particular hardships to which these countries are subjected, everything possible be done to achieve the immediate implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification in the region.

Resolution 4. Effect of weapons of mass destruction on ecosystems

32. In resolution 4 of 9 September 1977, the Conference, noting that the use of chemical and biological weapons during wars had been one of the contributing factors to desertification in certain parts of the world, condemned the use of any weapons that cause destruction of the environment; demanded the prohibition of the use of poisons in water as a weapon of war; appealed to all Member States to refrain from using or supplying to those who support this policy of destruction, arms or chemical products for military use that have a widespread, long-lasting or severe effect on the environment; and requested the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of this resolution to the General Assembly.

33. The Secretary-General will in due course report on the possible programme budget implications of this request.

Resolution 5. Colonial desertification practices

34. In resolution 5 of 9 September 1977, the Conference condemned the policy of Bantustanization, which it considered a very serious factor causing desertification and degradation of the environment; requested Member States to undertake immediate international action with a view to prohibiting the continuation of this policy; and appealed to all Member States to refrain from recognizing the Bantustans.

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Resolution 6. Namibia: desertification

35. In resolution 6 of 7 September 1977, the Conference, recalling, inter alia, Security Council resolution 385 (1976) of 30 January 1976, condemned the continued illegal occupation of the Territory of Namibia by South Africa, and recognized that proper implementation in Namibia of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification would not be possible until the illegal occupation by South Africa had been terminated and Namibia had achieved independence.

Resolution 7. Associated case study "The Negev:  
a desert reclaimed" 10/

36. In resolution 7 of 8 September 1977, the Conference, considering that the case study entitled "The Negev: a desert reclaimed" (A/CONF.74/20), presented by Israel, departed from the scientific and technical issues which the Conference was directed to examine, and that it was not in conformity with the aims and purposes of the Conference, as laid down in General Assembly resolution 3337 (XXIX); further considering that the policies of settlement and displacement of populations in the Negev, the West Bank of the Jordan and other areas constituted an aggravating factor leading to desertification, denounced the case study on the Negev (A/CONF.74/20).

Resolution 8. Expression of thanks

37. By resolution 8 of 9 September 1977, the Conference expressed its profound appreciation to the President, the Government and people of Kenya for making possible the holding of the Conference and for their generous hospitality and their great contribution to the successful outcome of its work.