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UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION

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Ninth session
Buenos Aires, 21 September–2 October 2009

Item 11 of the provisional agenda
Promotion and strengthening of relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies

Support by the United Nations Environment Programme to the Implementation of the Convention

Note by the secretariat*

Summary

Bearing in mind the importance of the conclusions of the Desertification Synthesis of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, and with reference to decision 4/COP.8 of the United Nations Convention to Combat desertification (UNCCD), the secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has contributed to a strengthening of global efforts to combat desertification and land degradation.

This document was prepared in order to inform Parties at the ninth session of the Conference of the Parties of the activities of UNEP in support of the implementation of the UNCCD. The report details UNEP contributions in the following areas: the implementation of the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008–2018); global food crises and sustainable land management in drylands; indicators of dryland biodiversity and land degradation in drylands; water-related programmes; joint reporting; pastoral livelihoods; drought and climate change; reforestation and tree-planting campaigns; and capacity-building.

* This document was received on 27 August 2009 and is submitted in order to provide Parties with the latest available information. In accordance with the procedure for miscellaneous documents, the submission is attached and reproduced as received and without formal editing.

United Nations Environment Programme

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PROGRAMME DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'ENVIRONNEMENT · PROGRAMA DE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS PARA EL MEDIO AMBIENTE

ПРОГРАММА ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ ОБЪЕДИНЕННЫХ НАЦИЙ ПО ОКРУЖАЮЩЕЙ СРЕДЕ

Report to the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, at its ninth session 21 September–2 October 2009, Buenos Aires

I. Introduction

1. The present report describes major activities of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in support of the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa for submission to the Conference of the Parties to the Convention at its ninth session. The report also addresses key UNEP contributions to the implementation of the Convention's 10-year strategic plan.

II. UNEP substantive support to the Convention

A. Contribution to the implementation of the 10-year strategic plan

2. UNEP is collaborating with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the secretariat of the Convention to Combat Desertification in a tripartite effort to deliver components of the Convention's 10-year strategic plan, especially in building a case for concerted investment for sustainable dryland management and human well-being for consideration at the fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which will take place in December 2009 in Copenhagen. As part of this collaboration, the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre has prepared a report entitled "Carbon in drylands: desertification, climate change and carbon finance". The report reviews research on the amount of carbon stored in drylands, emissions associated with land degradation in drylands and the potential for increasing dryland carbon storage and sequestration. It was presented at the seventh session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (i.e., the Convention to Combat Desertification) in November 2008. The report was also presented by the World Conservation Monitoring Centre at a side event during the fourteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Climate Change Convention, in Poznan, Poland, in December 2008.

3. UNEP is also collaborating with the Environment Management Group to identify the scope, modalities and deliverables for a process being elaborated by the Group on land, including the identification of time-bound issues that require coordinated United Nations system-wide contributions to the implementation of the 10-year strategic plan of the Convention to Combat Desertification. An informal meeting of the Environment Management Group on land was held in New York on 14 May 2009, in the margins of the seventeenth session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development. One of the recommendations that emanated from that meeting was that a rapid response assessment policy report on drylands should be developed, focusing on emerging issues on the global agenda including climate change, food security and investment opportunities. UNEP is supporting the Environment Management Group in the development of the assessment report "a Rapid Response Assessment Report on Drylands".

4. UNEP, through the World Conservation Monitoring Centre and funding from the UNEP Division of Global Environment Facility Coordination, is developing a $2.8 million initiative for the

Convention to Combat Desertification entitled "Enabling paradigm shift on monitoring and assessment within the UNCCD – piloting the reporting of performance indicators 2010".

B. Global food crises and sustainable land management in drylands

5. UNEP has highlighted environmental and policy issues related to sustainable land management in drylands in response to the global food crisis through inputs to the High Level Group in the development of the United Nations Secretary-General's "Framework for Action" report. More important, as a supplement to that report UNEP has produced the report "The environmental food crisis: the environment's role in averting future food crises: a UNEP rapid response assessment". The latter report addresses the links between land degradation and food production, direct and indirect drivers and related policies.

6. In April 2009 UNEP, in collaboration with the Nairobi-based centres of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research and a number of other research organizations, established the Nairobi Science and Policy Forum on Sustainability of Agroecosystems. The Forum, a long-term project, will discuss and produce policy papers on emerging issues in the areas of food security, environment and human well-being, including drylands and other food production ecosystems.

C. Response to the Convention to Combat Desertification: decisions from the eighth session of the Conference of the Parties relevant to UNEP

1. Decision 1/COP.8 on strengthening the implementation of the Convention in all regions

7. UNEP has contributed to the strengthening of the implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification in all regions through its contribution to the implementation of both subregional and regional action programmes.

8. The work on subregional action programmes has included three projects with a focus on the management of shared transboundary water and forest resources. The Fouta Djallon Highlands integrated water resources management project in West Africa was approved by the Division of Global Environment Facility Coordination in October 2008 with funding from the Division of $11 million and co-financing of $33 million over a 10-year period. The countries participating in the project include the Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger, Senegal and Sierra Leone. Implementation of the project started in May 2009. In West Africa, the Nigeria-Niger Integrated Ecosystem Management Project has been under way since 2006 with funding from the Division of Global Environment Facility Coordination of $10 million and co-financing of $19 million over an eight-year period. In Latin America, the sustainable forest management in the transboundary Gran Chaco Americano ecosystem project (covering Argentina, Paraguay and the Plurinational State of Bolivia) was approved in 2008 with funding from the Division of Global Environment Facility Coordination of $8 million and co-financing of $18 million over five years.

9. Work on implementation of regional action programmes includes the $1 million dryland wildlife environment interface project funded by the Division of Global Environment Facility Coordination (covering Burkina Faso and Kenya), which has recently been completed. The project supported the Convention's thematic programme network No. 3 on sustainable management of rangelands and resources, which the African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources is coordinating for the Convention to Combat Desertification.

10. UNEP, through its Division of Environmental Law and Conventions and Division of Global Environment Facility Coordination, participated in the inter-agency task force that has given technical backstopping to the secretariat of the Convention to Combat Desertification in the development of performance and impact indicators and reporting guidelines that will be submitted at the eighth and ninth sessions of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention for validation. To support Parties in their fourth round of national reporting the Division of Global Environment Facility Coordination, in collaboration with the secretariat of the Convention to Combat Desertification, has developed a project identification form that was submitted to the

Global Environment Facility for financing. This project will also support the assessment of the baseline situation of the implementation of the Convention.

2. **Decision 6/COP.8 on collaboration with the Global Environment Facility**

11. To tackle effectively the serious problems caused by land degradation in Africa the Global Environment Facility (GEF) approved in June 2006 a strategic investment programme for sustainable land management in sub-Saharan Africa. Through the programme GEF will provide $150 million in grant funds that it will aim to leverage to secure from $750 million to $1 billion from domestic sources and bilateral and multilateral partners. The money will be used to fund investments in sustainable land management in Africa through the GEF implementing and executing agencies: the World Bank, the African Development Bank, UNDP, UNEP, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development. The TerrAfrica initiative is intended to support and strengthen implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme and the action plan of the NEPAD environment initiative. UNEP is developing four transboundary projects (with a $12 million GEF grant) on management of transboundary natural resources, capacity-building and advocacy for sustainable land management.

3. **Decision 13/COP.8 on reshaping the operation of the Committee on Science and Technology in line with the recommendations of the Intergovernmental Intersessional Working Group 10-year strategic plan**

12. UNEP has actively participated in the work of the Convention's Committee on Science and Technology and is one of the sponsors of the Committee's scientific conference that is being organized for the ninth session of the Conference of the Parties by the Dryland Science for Development Consortium under the leadership of the International Crop Research Institute of the Semi-Arid Tropics. UNEP is a member of the Intergovernmental Intersessional Working Group on the 10-year strategic plan.

D. Indicators for dryland biodiversity

13. The UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre will present a poster and organize a side event during a special segment of the ninth session of the Committee on Science and Technology. The special segment will be a scientific conference organized by the Dryland Science for Development Consortium on the topic of global indicator development. The poster and the side event will be based on the experience gained through a 2010 biodiversity indicator project funded by the Division of Global Environment Facility Coordination, which includes dryland indicators, and will focus on process lessons.

E. Drylands assessment

14. UNEP contributed to a rapid response assessment on biosequestration entitled "The natural fix? The role of ecosystems in climate mitigation", which was launched on World Environment Day (5 June 2009) and was led by the World Conservation Monitoring Centre. It looks beyond forests and the debates on reducing carbon emissions from deforestation and forest degradation to the potential of natural and agricultural ecosystems for capturing and storing carbon. It examines the potential for improving livelihoods and ecosystem services through managing ecosystem carbon and considers the implications for policy. Drylands, in particular, offer opportunities for combining carbon management and land restoration. The assessment found that the large surface area of drylands gives dryland carbon sequestration a global significance notwithstanding the relatively low carbon density of drylands. That many dryland soils have been degraded means that they are currently far from saturated with carbon and that their potential to sequester carbon can be high.

1. Land degradation assessment in drylands

15. UNEP, through its Division of Global Environment Facility Coordination, is the implementing agency for the land degradation assessment in drylands (LADA) project executed by FAO. The project is aimed at the development of tools and methods for assessing and quantifying the nature, extent, severity and impact of land degradation on dryland ecosystems, watersheds, river basins, carbon storage and biological diversity on a range of spatial and temporal scales. It is also includes efforts to build national, regional and international capacity to analyse, design, plan and implement interventions to mitigate land degradation and establish sustainable land use and management practices.

16. To achieve these objectives, the project participants have developed standardized and improved methods for dryland degradation assessment, with guidelines for their implementation on a range of scales. Through those methods the regional and global baseline condition of land degradation is assessed with a view to highlighting the areas at greatest risk. These assessments are supplemented by detailed local assessments focusing on root-cause analyses of land degradation and on local (traditional and adapted) technologies for the mitigation of land degradation. Best practice guidelines are being developed and the results widely disseminated. The project is making an innovative contribution to methodologies and monitoring systems for land degradation, supplemented by empirically derived lessons from the six main partner countries involved in the project: Argentina, China, Cuba, Senegal, South Africa and Tunisia. The project provides a major contribution to unlocking the knowledge and understanding of land degradation and will therefore facilitate the prioritization of actions.

F. UNEP publications

17. UNEP produces the Global Environment Outlook series and the UNEP Year Book, in keeping with its mandate to keep the state of the environment under review. The publications examine global social and economic trends and regional environmental problems, including their human dimensions. They provide an outlook for the future and policy options for addressing present and emerging environmental issues. UNEP has published the *Africa: Atlas of Our Changing Environment* and the *Kenya: Atlas of Our Changing Environment*, featuring aspects of land degradation, using satellite imagery.

18. UNEP is also continuing on the coordination of the *New World Atlas on Land Degradation, Desertification and Drought*, in collaboration with the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission and other partners. Two expert meetings have been held to establish a road map and outline the atlases' contents.

III. Water harvesting

19. UNEP implemented a project on rainwater harvesting in Olepolos, in the Kajiado district in Kenya. This is a semi-arid area occupied by the Masai community, who are nomadic pastoralists and whose livelihood is based on natural resources. The long and frequent droughts over the past decade have degraded the land, which has led in turn to overgrazing and catchment degradation, significantly affecting the community's well-being.

20. UNEP support began in 2001 with capacity-building for members of the community on rainwater harvesting. The project adopted a gender-sensitive approach that met the needs of both men and women. Recognizing that women lacked adequate capacity to contribute to the management of water, the project started with a capacity-building initiative to raise their capacity to that of men. It was implemented in partnership with EarthCare Africa.

21. In 2004, the project was scaled up to include promoting the use of rainwater harvesting for improving the community's environment and social and economic status and to contribute to livelihood security and poverty alleviation. This phase was implemented in partnership with the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), Land Use Consultants of Nakuru and the Rotary Club. The main outputs of the project were rainwater harvesting ferrocement tanks, run-off ponds, kitchen

gardens, trenches, energy-saving stoves, family woodlots and a video on the use of rainwater harvesting to reduce poverty. In addition, guidelines and a video on microfinance were also produced.

22. The project has improved access to water and sanitation; contributed to improved food security through kitchen gardens; contributed to poverty alleviation by introducing microfinance, which has enabled the community to undertake income-generation projects taking advantage of time saved and improved water availability; and contributed to ecosystem rehabilitation through the establishment of family woodlots and energy-saving stoves that are reducing demand for firewood.

23. The project is spreading to neighbouring areas. Community interest groups increased from 19 to 50 over a two-year period and their number is continuing to rise. In addition, the project provides demonstration sites for communities in Machakos area of Kenya and in the United Republic of Tanzania. At present, UNEP and ICRAF are supporting the community in the construction of three sand dams.

24. UNEP cooperates on a number of matters with the Ministry of Science and Technology of China. In that context UNEP and the Gansu Research Institute for Water Conservancy in China organized a rainwater harvesting training session in May 2009. The aim was to provide African water experts and planners with technical support and to build the capacity of African countries in various areas of environmental management. The training is part of a joint project on rainwater harvesting for augmenting water resources and ecosystems management, which covers Kenya, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

A. Other water-related initiatives for drylands in Africa

1. Yatta (Kenya)

25. This project is a follow-up to the above-mentioned project in Kajiado. Yatta district is located in Eastern province in Kenya. The community from Ekalakala in Yatta district and the Tana Catchment Authority requested UNEP to provide support for improving water management in the area. The Authority, responsible for water resource management in the catchment area, has developed an integrated water resource management plan that focuses mainly on water resources with little attention to ecosystems. The Authority is currently implementing the plans and it is important to ensure that the ecosystems approach is fully understood and mainstreamed into those plans. UNEP will provide support for implementing the plans using the ecosystem approach. UNEP will also support the development and implementation of community-based management planning while building on existing plans and activities. The project has just begun and it is expected that it will result in the improved capacity of the Yatta community to implement its integrated water resource management plan using an ecosystems approach to improve human well-being and ecosystem health in the catchment area.

2. Lake Faguibine (Mali)

26. Lake Faguibine, located in Mali, has been drying up since the mid-1970s. The decrease in the lake's water level has contributed to loss of biodiversity and has increased poverty in the area, forcing more than 200,000 people to abandon their traditional livelihoods based on agriculture, livestock, forestry and fishing. UNEP is supporting the Government of Mali and local partners through a project to restore crucial ecosystem services that form the base for fishing, biodiversity, recession agriculture and ecotourism. The project aims to quantify the potential of the lake's ecosystem services under varied climate change and human intervention scenarios. It puts human well-being at its pivot by engaging a wide cross-section of ethnic and social groups around the lake and emphasizes the empowering of women in ecosystem management. It thus tackles issues related to HIV/AIDS and malaria, which are likely to increase if more people return to the lake and the surface area of the lake increases, providing a breeding ground for mosquitoes. The project aims to improve Mali's capacity to engage relevant actors in a national policy dialogue on water and sustainable ecosystem service delivery for human well-being.

27. The main activities under the project will be:

(a) To quantify the lake's potential;

(b) To improve management of land and the hydrological cycle;

(c) To dredge over two million cubic metres of sand blocking the water channels that feed the lake;

(d) To build in-country capacity and strategic partnerships with key stakeholders to take the project forward;

(e) To raise communities' awareness of the importance of water flows in the Niger River and in the water channels;

(f) To improve local stakeholders' knowledge by working together on priority ecosystem management interventions.

28. It is anticipated that the project will:

(a) Improve the livelihoods of about 200,000 mainly nomadic people living in and around the area;

(b) Restore the habitat vital to thousands of migratory birds.

(c) Increase the availability of drinking water for human beings and livestock;

(d) Enhance institutional, organizational and technical capacity of Governments, non-governmental organizations and research institutions to engage local user groups in sustainable natural resource management.

B. Africa-China cooperation programme

29. UNEP facilitates a programme of cooperation between Africa and China, in the context of which a joint project has been developed entitled "Building the capacity and improving the resilience of African countries to cope with water stress and adapt to climate change". The various components of the project include: reuse of wastewater for forest planting in Egypt, Kenya and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya; development of a drought early warning system and enhancement of the ability to adapt to drought in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco and Zambia; enhancement of the capacity for monitoring shared water resources of Lake Tanganyika, covering the four countries that border the Lake: Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.

IV. Joint reporting on drylands for the Convention to Combat Desertification and the Convention on Biological Diversity

30. The Convention to Combat Desertification and the Convention on Biological Diversity operate a joint work programme. Element C1 of the programme pertains to national reporting under the two conventions. It states:

> The two Secretariats will seek to identify harmonized formats of reporting in compliance with their respective obligations. Joint reporting will be in line with the provisions in the programme of work under the Convention on Biological Diversity on the biodiversity of dry and sub-humid lands, as well as the ongoing work to harmonize reporting under the Convention with that of the other biodiversity-related conventions.

31. In support of this programme element and as part of a wider UNEP project entitled "knowledge management between biodiversity-related conventions", the World Conservation Monitoring Centre, in collaboration with the UNEP Division of Environmental Law and Conventions, drafted a potential joint reporting framework on drylands for the two conventions. This work builds on the current reporting formats of the two conventions, on the programme of work on dry and sub-humid lands of the Convention on Biological Diversity and on the other elements of the joint programme of work between the two conventions. The framework is available online at: http://www.unep-wcmc.org/conventions/knowledgemanagement.aspx.

V. Biodiversity

A. Biodiversity and pastoral livelihoods

32. Decision IX/17 of the Conference of the Parties requests the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity to work with the Convention to Combat Desertification and FAO to establish the means to strengthen collaboration on pastoral and agricultural use of dry and sub-humid lands. The secretariat, under the guidance of a steering committee comprising, among others, representatives of the Convention to Combat Desertification and FAO, has accordingly developed a toolkit on pastoralism. The toolkit will be made available at the ninth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification.

B. Biodiversity, drought and climate change

33. Decision IX/17 of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity requests the secretariat of the Convention to elaborate further the links between biodiversity, drought and climate change. The secretariat has accordingly prepared a report based on a review of the literature on available knowledge, tools and resources for managing biodiversity in dry and sub-humid lands within the framework of climate change and drought. The report has been reviewed by the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

34. The secretariat's work on drought and climate change also responds to a broader request in the same decision to develop, in collaboration with the Convention to Combat Desertification, proposals for the integration of climate change considerations within the programme of work on the biodiversity of dry and sub-humid lands. This broader request calls for the secretariat to undertake an analysis of how climate change considerations are already addressed in the programme of work, including an assessment of implementation so far. In conducting such an analysis, the secretariat is developing a number of case studies on climate change, biodiversity and combating land degradation and desertification, all of which will soon be available on the Convention website.

35. Finally, with regard to biodiversity, climate change and combating land degradation and desertification, the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, in collaboration with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), recently completed a research project on experiences in the field of climate change mitigation and adaptation, soil management and pastoralism in dry and sub-humid lands, as requested by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention in decision IX/17.

C. Joint reporting

36. Decision IX/17 of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity requests the secretariat of the Convention to continue collaboration with the Convention to Combat Desertification on harmonized reporting. Accordingly, the secretariat is an active member of the Convention's Inter-Agency Task Force on Harmonized Reporting.

D. Enhancing synergies

37. Decision IX/16 of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity requests the secretariat of the Convention to continue to work with the secretariats of the other Rio conventions through the conventions' Joint Liaison Group. Accordingly, the ninth meeting of the Joint Liaison Group was convened on 14 May 2009 in New York. This meeting, chaired by the

Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, provided an opportunity for updates and briefings on recent meetings held within the Rio convention processes. Participants at the meeting also discussed requests for joint activities issued by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity at its ninth meeting, opportunities for coordination among rosters of experts, indicators for enhanced synergies, the differing expectations for the Joint Liaison Group on the part of those participating in the three Convention processes and the role of the Joint Liaison Group in the celebration of the International Year of Biodiversity in 2010.

VI. Tree planting campaign

A. Billion Tree Campaign

38. The "Plant for the Planet: Billion Tree Campaign" is a UNEP-led initiative and the first United Nations global tree-planting campaign. Open to everyone, it has catalysed environmental action for climate change mitigation, the restoration of biodiversity, improved air and soil quality, urban beautification and food security.

39. An interactive website is available in seven languages (www.unep.org/billiontreecampaign). A counter registers tree-planting pledges and planted trees and features photographs, videos and news from the campaign.

40. In two-and-a-half years over 4.1 billion trees were planted in 166 countries by people from all spheres of society, from slum-dwellers to heads of State. The campaign has been welcomed with enthusiasm all over the world.

41. The campaign demonstrates that a focused, people-centred project can be an incentive for positive and immediate action, including mitigating land degradation and combating desertification, for the good of all. The campaign operates under the patronage of Ms. Wangari Maathai, founder of the Green Belt Movement in Kenya and 2004 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, and Prince Albert II of Monaco. The campaign has also received a UN 21 award "as a substantive programme for improving efficiency in the United Nations".

B. Reforestation facility

42. UNEP, in cooperation with three local nature conservation non-governmental organizations, has established a reforestation facility for rehabilitating degraded water catchment areas in Kenya through reforestation. The facility collaborates with private sector entities, local communities and government institutions in charge of forest management and aims to plant at least 100,000 trees each year. Its activities will contribute to the UNEP Billion Tree Campaign and will help to offset the UNEP carbon footprint.

VII. Capacity-building tools and activities

43. A key component of the UNEP strategy for following up on the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment is the production of a methods manual entitled "Assessing ecosystems and human well-being: a guide to the process". The manual, produced by more than 20 expert authors coordinated by the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre, is to be published in December 2009 and will constitute an important tool for catalysing capacity-building initiatives, especially among new and emerging assessments on a sub-global scale. The World Conservation Monitoring Centre will initiate a programme of capacity-building structured around the manual, with a special focus on national capacity in dryland management. A joint training event with the UNDP-UNEP Poverty and Environment Initiative in November 2009 will be the first in a series of regional training events aimed at new and emerging ecosystem assessment practitioners.

44. UNEP organized a national conference on the role of women in combating desertification in Egypt in 2008. The conference was aimed at building the capacity of local communities, especially women, on methodologies for integrated water management and combating desertification and encouraging local and national authorities to enforce laws and regulations related to desertification.

45. The UNEP Regional Office for West Asia:

(a) Participated in twice-yearly meetings of the Arab Team on Desertification and Biodiversity, set up under the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment and the League of Arab States" and provided technical and policy advice regarding the development and implementation of the Team's workplan;

(b) Provided technical input for the Arab region's report to the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development at its sixteenth session;[1]

(c) Provided technical support, guidance and capacity-building to Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar and Yemen in the preparation of their Convention to Combat Desertification national action plans. Similar support for the occupied Palestinian territories is currently being provided;

(d) Organized, in cooperation with the Arab Centre for the Study of Arid Zones and Dry Lands, the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment and the League of Arab States, a coordination meeting of Convention to Combat Desertification regional focal points for the seventh session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention, which took place in Damascus on 10 and 11 October 2008;

(e) Organized, in cooperation with Kuwait University and other partners, a conference on land degradation in dry environments, which took place in Kuwait from 8 to 4 March 2009;

(f) Organized, in cooperation with the Arab Centre for the Study of Dry Zones and Arid Lands and the International Environmental Technology Centre of the UNEP Division of Technology, Industry and Economics, a training course on sustainable management of the Iraqi marshlands, which took place in Damascus from 7 to 15 April 2008;

(g) Organized, in cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Western Asia, the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment and the League of Arab States, a regional conference on land degradation issues in the Arab region, which took place in Cairo from 30 October to 1 November 2007.

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1 The main themes for the sixteenth and seventeenth sessions of the Commission include agriculture, rural development, desertification, land and drought.

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