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President's Summary of the round table discussions by Ministers and Heads of delegation at the High Level Segment of COP9

Introduction

1. The high-level segment of the ninth session of the Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP 9), held on 28 and 29 September 2009 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, presented itself as a true demonstration of the Parties' commitment to defining the axes of the UNCCD, as it marked the launching pad for the implementation of the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (The Strategy), adopted by Parties at COP 8 in Madrid in 2007. The vision of the Parties that we must seek to realize through the implementation of The Strategy is stated as follows: *"The aim for the future is to forge a global partnership to reverse and prevent desertification/land degradation and to mitigate the effects of drought in affected areas in order to support poverty reduction and environmental sustainability"*.

2. On the occasion of the high-level segment, Ministers and heads of delegations and international organizations held a plenary session in the form of three ministerial round tables in a participative mode. Political authorities introduced matters and discussed real responses to emerging challenges as they relate to desertification/land degradation and drought. There were three round-table discussions:

(a) Round table 1: The global trends of desertification/land degradation and drought: liaison with other problems and challenges for decision makers and stakeholders;

(b) Round table 2: Desertification/land degradation and climate change: what role for the land in the ongoing negotiations for a new climate change regime at Copenhagen?

(c) Round table 3: Partnerships and institutions for combating desertification/land degradation and drought: the path to improvement.

3. These themes can be successfully addressed only by taking an integrated approach, which addresses the physical, biological, socio-economic and cultural aspects of drylands. The UNCCD is a unique instrument in that it incorporates both environmental and social elements. It is therefore paramount that a robust scientific underpinning, based on expertise from relevant scientists, has to be supported in the context of efforts to implement the Convention.

Round table 1: The global trends of desertification, land degradation and drought: liaison with other problems and challenges for decision makers and stakeholders

4. Speakers noted the critical lack of food security, lack of energy security, biodiversity loss, lack of water security and related issues such as conflict and migration. Dust and sandstorms, and increased vulnerability to natural hazards due to climate change and drylands were also noted.

5. Speakers said it is vital that the findings from key global scientific assessments, as well as of the research of the broader scientific community, are accessible to and used by decision makers. Such scientific information can help to focus efforts on addressing the key gaps in data and knowledge, leading to real benefits for the world's dryland ecosystems and their inhabitants, and for the wider global socio-ecological system, as well as to make progress towards broader environmental and development goals.

6. Most speakers expressed their concern about the UNCCD's lacking a solid and authoritative science base and noted that the data sets available are fragmented and lack unity. There is still a significant lack of knowledge on the trends of desertification/land degradation and drought. There is a need for higher-resolution and downscaled regional models, especially in the context of adaptation strategies. The UNCCD needs better knowledge management systems and Early Warning and Drought Monitoring Systems, while traditional knowledge should be given higher consideration.

7. In a solution-oriented approach, speakers suggested the establishing of a unified methodology for measuring drylands, and the launching of a credible and authoritative science-policy interface for the UNCCD, including academia, the private sector and regional balance, and the creation of synergies among the Rio and related Conventions and processes such as UNFF. They also called for a global assessment of the 'economics of drylands' that will calculate the cost of action vs the cost of inaction.

Round table 2: Desertification/land degradation and climate change: what role for the land in the ongoing negotiations for a new climate change regime at Copenhagen?

8. Desertification refers to land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities. The linkages between climate change and desertification/land degradation must be capitalized on when undertaking the most appropriate synergistic responses that simultaneously address both phenomena.

9. Addressing desertification/land degradation and drought issues is one of the most important ways of addressing the climate change issues, whereby the processes must be understood separately from one another. In this way, the resilience of the inhabitants of the drylands can be brought about, and their potential to adapt to climate change can be enhanced. Activities to combat desertification/land degradation are mostly undertaken on the land in order to boost the productivity of the soil and guarantee the availability of other natural resources with a view to enhancing sustainable development.

10. Speakers identified the following major problems: The global food crisis is worsening due to climate change, and environment-induced migration is becoming more severe. Speakers called, moreover, for a stronger coordinating mechanism for all structures, components and parts of the Convention, especially the Committee on Science and Technology which has to have a better regional balance and a new point of view on science and adequate financial resources and technology transfer.

11. We need better understanding of the global impact of desertification/land degradation and drought, and a more holistic approach to adaptation and mitigation; and the 'science to policy' interface needs to be addressed. Speakers called for strengthened cooperation with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD), in order, through a holistic view, to avoid conflict among the Rio Conventions, and enhanced work with the UNFCCC on adaptation and soil carbon sequestration issues. While the drylands must remain a focus, as the risk is high there, their potential and opportunities are to be further explored.

12. A focus on adaptation to climate change and on carbon in the soil was addressed as entry points to the climate discourse and the UNFCCC process. A proposed action was making good use of the development of renewable energy, such as the establishment of a renewable energy framework.

13. Many speakers called for better use of economic models and trading strategies, and reiterated that a cost benefit analysis report in the form of a "Stern Review" on drylands is much needed. The enhancement of South-South cooperation and technology transfer as well as the establishment of an inter-governmental panel on land and soil were other proposals put forward by speakers.

**Round table 3: Partnerships and institutions for combating desertification,
land degradation and drought: the path to improvement**

14. One of the issues raised at this Round Table included the identification of a UNCCD investment and capacity-building framework, under which the actions of Convention institutions and pertinent United Nations system institutions, as well as other relevant stakeholders, could meet, while stimulating finance for the process. Progress on a "solutions approach" would contribute to enhanced conservation and use of natural resources and harmonize emerging options (such as funding for adaptation in drylands coming from climate change negotiations or contributions to the continuum soil-land-food security) while achieving the Millennium Development Goals in conformity with new aid modalities.

15. Seizing technological and economic options – obviously involving public/private partnerships – will increase the effectiveness of the mobilization of resources for drylands. Resources allocated to the implementation of the Strategy could result in multiple benefits, through the preservation of the productive services of land-based ecosystems and adaptation to climate change.

16. Parties expressed concern about the lack of coordination between scientists, agencies and civil society organizations (CSOs). They said that there is little awareness of the costs of inaction in degraded lands but much need for a reliable way of measuring land degradation in order to promote investment, and much need to build on the potential synergy of Rio Conventions that shifts the paradigm to sustainable land management (SLM). Also, there is a need for strategic partnerships and cooperative frameworks for economic stimulus packages and food security which are linked to country policies. Research will be based on an equal distribution. Investment needs to be based on equality and justice. Inaction on dryland problems may be considered a matter of global justice.

17. Speakers suggested that SLM be viewed as a worthwhile investment as land degradation is a global problem requiring global partnerships. Stimulus packages should be implemented which increase green measures and renewable energy, especially in drylands. Leveraging resources and increasing funds under the Global Environment Facility focal area on Land Degradation was mentioned as key, while steering public finance to land degradation and fitting investment into the larger development framework should be fostered. Drylands shall be included in the “United Nations Delivering as One” campaign.

18. Speakers noted that investment in drylands can address migration and decrease urbanization problems, while regional coordination on sand and dust storms represents good solution examples. They called for increased coordination between CSOs, agencies and national action plans, and increased initiatives and opportunities at the international level for investors based on agreed-upon principles relating to bio-energy and land.

19. Furthermore, speakers asked COP 9 to solve the governance challenge of the UNCCD, building on the comparative advantages of its respective bodies, and for the COP 9 President to be the spokesperson for COP 9 at Copenhagen to convey the message on the relevance of land within the new climate regime.

Summary

20. The speakers during the High Level Segment agreed that the UNCCD and the 10-year Strategy offer a unique opportunity for the consolidation and convergence of United Nations entities towards a cooperative partnership to address drylands. Addressing desertification issues is one of the most important ways to combat climate change. Potential synergies and benefits from future adaptation strategies should focus on land and soils. Linkages between desertification and climate change should be fully recognized through adaptation and soil carbon sequestration, bearing in mind the specific mandates of each convention.

21. Building on the outcome and recommendations from the UNCCD 1st Scientific Conference, a more robust and regionally balanced scientific underpinning should be based on expertise from multiple relevant scientific, social-scientific and economic disciplines. Future

science-policy work should address the key topics of poverty eradication, water scarcity, food security and forced migration. Measurable monitoring and assessment systems should be developed that support early warning and drought monitoring systems.

22. Food security remains an increasingly urgent and critical problem on the international agenda. Strategies to address food security, energy security, water security, poverty alleviation, climate change and biodiversity require an integrated approach to sustainable land management issues that addresses both environmental and social elements. Sustainable use of drylands should serve multiple functions for the global good. The challenges linked to the sustainability of drylands should be encouraged by the creation of innovative approaches to medium- and long-term financial arrangements that include public-private-community partnerships.

23. Drylands should be viewed from a new value system. This requires a strengthened synergy and cooperation with UNFCCC and CBD. A cost benefit analysis report as well as economic models dealing with carbon accounting and trading strategies should be based on evidenced/based approaches and regional partnerships. Renewable energy is an important potential tool to solve development problems, climate change, desertification and food security. Promoting investment, combined with a renewed synergy of Rio conventions can produce holistic and robust strategies, strategic partnerships and cooperative frameworks.
