

Report on the Eleventh Session of the UNCCD Round Table for Parliamentarians
Ankara, Turkey, 20 and 21 October 2015
[submitted by facilitator Uwe Holtz]

1. The Eleventh Session of the Round Table for Parliamentarians was held on 20 and 21 October 2015 in Ankara in the premises of the Congressium Ankara International Convention & Exhibition Center in parallel with the twelfth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 12) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). The Round Table focused on “the role of Members of Parliament in the efforts to combat desertification, land degradation and drought: framing of legislation to protect and rehabilitate land in the context of a strengthened resilience to climate change”.

2. More than thirty Parliamentarians from Africa, Asia and Europe participated in the eleventh Round Table, which met at the invitation of the secretariat of the UNCCD and the Grand National Assembly of Turkey.

Day 1: Tuesday, 20 October 2015

I. Opening ceremony

3. The meeting was opened by Hon. Mr. Dr. Haroun Kabadi (Chad), President of the Steering Committee of the Round Table for Parliamentarians (RTP).

4. Mr. Rajeb Boulharouf, Chef de Cabinet of the UNCCD secretariat, welcomed the participants of the Round Table on behalf of Ms. Monique Barbut, the Executive Secretary of the secretariat, and expressed his appreciation and gratitude to the relevant authorities of Turkey. He gave an overview of the last developments, namely of the Steering Committee meeting in Bonn in July this year. He highlighted the increased recognition of land issues at the global level by particularly referring to the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in September at the New York Summit which include the target to strive to achieve a land-degradation world (SDG 15.3). Regarding land degradation neutrality (LDN) and sustainable development, he underscored that the involvement of Parliaments and Parliamentarians is of extreme importance. He appealed to the Parliamentarians to bring the core messages to the executive during the high-level meeting with Ministers.

5. Hon. Mr. Dr. Haroun Kabadi, President of the Steering Committee and President of the National Assembly of Chad, conveyed condolences to the host country with respect to the recent attacks in Ankara. He expressed his gratitude to the relevant authorities and the Parliament of Turkey and underlined the relevance of the Round Table. He gave an overview on past activities of the Steering Committee. By submitting some proposals to achieve LDN, he urged Parliaments and Parliamentarians to enhance efforts for a successful implementation of the UNCCD and the LDN target.

6. On behalf of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, Hon. Mr. Mehmet Naci Bostancı, Deputy Speaker of the Assembly, welcomed his colleagues from different regions of the world. A lesson he drew from human history for today's challenges is the recognition that land and soil were and are indispensable assets for human beings. He noted that if we are talking today of desertification, land degradation and the loss of soil, people are now aware of the value of nature and soil. He supported this argument with several striking examples taken from his country. Furthermore, he addressed topics such as natural disasters, food production and the rise of population.

II. Election of the Round Table Presidency and adoption of the agenda

7. After consultations and subsequent recommendations, the Bureau members were elected as follows: President Hon. Ms. Dr. Ravza Kavakçı-Kan (Turkey); Vice-Presidents Hon. Ms. Sophia Swartz (Namibia) and Hon. Mr. Dr. Ali Bin Saad Al Tokhais (Saudi Arabia). The elected President assumed the Presidency.

8. The proposed agenda was unanimously adopted.

III. Item I: Consideration of the report of the Steering Committee

9. The President of the Steering Committee, Hon. Mr. Dr. Haroun Kabadi, having already delivered parts of his report during the opening ceremony, added some remarks. He deplored that the members of the Steering Committee were mostly unable to attend the meetings and that many desirable activities could not be realized, for example in the field of awareness-raising among Parliamentarians – mainly due to a lack of sufficient financial resources.

10. No comments on or objections to the report were given.

IV. Item II: Panel discussion "Land based adaptation: a pathway to become resilient to climate change"

11. Panellist Hon. Mr. Gholamreza Nouri Gezeljeh (Iran) informed the participants about the measures undertaken by Iran, aimed at achieving the UNCCD objectives – ranging from desertification control based on a National Action Programme (NAP) parallel to streamlining NAP in strategic documents over the plantation of forests and revision of agricultural policies in dry areas to pertinent land use laws and a productivity enhancement law for natural resource management. In his view, the LDN target as part of the post-2015 development agenda will require an extension of public knowledge and more emphasis laid on the rehabilitation of degraded and eroded land.

12. Panellist Hon. Mr. YB Dato' Othman Bin Aziz (Malaysia) detected unsustainable human practices and climate change as major drivers of land degradation. He noticed that sustainability and resilience are closely interrelated. In Malaysia, sustainable land management (SLM), which promotes sustainable agricultural practice including well-structured irrigation management, organic farming techniques and proper handling of agricultural waste, as well as sustainable forest management – both embedded in the concept of green growth – play a crucial role in increasing resilience to climate change. He considered the RTP as being an ideal platform for Parliamentarians to discuss how the LDN target could be achieved across various regions and countries by 2030.

13. Panellist Hon. Ms. Sophia Swartz (Namibia) noted her country already started a National Programme to Combat Desertification in 1994, which was replaced by the Country Pilot

Partnership for Integrated SLM, funded by the Global Environment Facility in 2007 and running until 2018. She mentioned several key achievements: improvement of the policy framework, partnerships between government and civil society, training and awareness creation, new community-driven approaches to SLM as well as innovative grants mechanism for small and medium enterprises combining the sustainable use of natural resources with income generation and training.

14. Hon. Mr. Šefik Džaferović (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, said effective protection of nature, the fight against desertification and the mitigation of climate and thermal changes require appropriate institutions and an improvement of the legislative framework.

15. Hon. Ms. Dr. Joyce C. Laboso (Kenya), Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Kenya, deplored that particularly poor and vulnerable people are suffering from land degradation and economic damages. She underlined that the LDN target of SDG 15 will require a paradigm shift in land stewardship in her country.

16. Hon. Ms. Rafika Kesri (Algeria) explained that – with respect to desertification – several institutional reforms as well as concrete programmes and plans were developed, a road-map identified and a coordination centre created – measures aimed at saving plenty of soil.

17. Hon. Mr. Mohamed Ould Boilil (Mauritania), President of the National Assembly of Mauritania, regretted that many anti-desertification activities did not reach the expected results. National and international efforts were strengthened, e.g. the cooperation with NGOs or the Green Wall project for the Sahara.

18. Hon. Mr. Ahmed Sadqi (Morocco) called for a better synergy approach related to climate change, desertification and the loss of biodiversity. He reported that his country is continuing to enhance legislation on desertification.

19. Hon. Ms. Maria Lourdes Acosta-Alba (Philippines) said her country is belonging to the most vulnerable places in the world suffering from climate change. In her view, land-based adaptation and SLM, increased resilience and better synergy among the Rio Convention are needed. MPs are pushing pertinent legislation, but often blocked by short-sighted interests.

V. Item III: Election of a drafting Committee for the preparation of a Declaration by Members of Parliament

20. With the assistance of Prof. Uwe Holtz as facilitator, the following Parliamentarians were elected to prepare the draft Declaration: Hon. Dr. Ali Bin Saad Al Tokhais (Saudi Arabia) as rapporteur, Hon. Mr. Gholamreza Nouri Gezeljeh (Iran), Hon. Ms. Sophia Swartz (Namibia), and Hon. Ms. Dr Ravza Kavakçı-Kan (Turkey).

Day 2: Wednesday, 21 October 2015

VI. Item IV: Consideration of the draft Declaration and adoption of the Declaration

21. The President opened the second day's deliberations. She was pleased to see a generally good attendance at the RTP, but deplored the low participation of Europe and the absence of Latin America and the Caribbean.

22. She thanked the drafting Committee, appreciated the good, consensual work of the Committee, added that some ten amendments had been made to the first draft already

revised during the last Steering Committee meeting in Bonn¹ and asked to replace in the new draft “Parliament” of Turkey by “Grand National Assembly”.

23. The rapporteur, Hon. Mr. Dr. Ali Bin Saad Al Tokhais (Saudi Arabia), proceeded to read the whole final draft of the Declaration (also for translation purposes). Among others, he drew attention to the following positions, requirements and commitments: The enactment of enabling legislations and standards aligned with the objectives of the UNCCD and the LDN target must be supported by a clear roadmap in line with climate-resilient development pathways and be accompanied by regular review processes. Substantial, adequate, timely and predictable financial resources are needed for promoting climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience measures undertaken within the UNCCD framework or soil-related programmes. Sharing good practices, information, knowledge, experience and lessons learned with regard to SLM and LDN projects and programmes would facilitate the identification and replication of successful practices. Therefore, exemplary activities are given in footnote 1 to paragraph 23. Parliaments and Parliamentarians should act as agents of change and sensitize the public about the SDGs, in particular the goal of halting and reversing land degradation. The potential of the Parliamentary Network on the UNCCD should be maximized as a platform to share good examples of anti-desertification activities; its Steering Committee is invited to consider options for improved follow-up to the Declarations of the Round Tables and for the efficient use of the UNCCD handbook for parliamentary action.²

24. The President thanked the rapporteur and asked for comments or amendments from the Parliamentarians.

25. Hon. Mr. Dr. Haroun Kabadi (Chad) welcomed the draft Declaration. He asked for clarification about the wording in paragraph 7 relating to agricultural protection arrangements and subsidized agricultural exports (the clarification was given by the rapporteur and the facilitator Prof. Holtz). His proposal to replace “fiscal tools” by “financial tools” in paragraph 20 was accepted by the RTP. In paragraph 26, he pointed to the fact that is very difficult for illiterate people “to capitalize on the benefits of the modern information and communication technologies”; the proposal by the facilitator to add in the beginning “strengthen access to and” was accepted by him and the RTP.

26. Hon. Mr. Gholamreza Nouri Gezeljeh (Iran) was entirely satisfied with the text and endorsed the draft.

27. Hon. Ms. Rafika Kesri (Algeria) rightly asked for the correction of a typing error in the preamble starting with “note” (replacement of “adoption” by “adaptation”). Then she asked the facilitator to read the full English text of footnote 1 to paragraph 23 where exemplary SLM and LDN activities are enumerated. The facilitator explained that some MPs had wished during the Steering Committee meeting in Bonn to see included such examples in the Declaration. The question if this footnote should be maintained received a positive answer from the RTP.

28. Hon. Mr. Vipuakuje Muharukua (Namibia) asked for clarification of paragraph 6: “Land should be fully integrated into the new global climate change agreement as both mitigation and adaptation measure.” He was satisfied with the explanation given by the facilitator.

29. The Declaration was unanimously adopted with the amendments made and submitted to the COP for consideration.

¹ This draft had been sent to the participants before the RTP meeting and it was included in the RTP files submitted to the MPs in Ankara.

² The UNCCD handbook “Role of parliamentarians in the Implementation Process of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification”, authored by Uwe Holtz, is available in English, French and Spanish at the UNCCD website <http://www.unccd.int/en/Stakeholders/Parliamentarians/Pages/Round-tables.aspx>

VII. Item V: Election of a new Steering Committee – Declaration by the incoming President – Closing remarks

30. The President gave some explanations about the mandate and the election procedure of the Steering Committee referring to the “Statute of the Forum of Parliamentarians” and to the “Rules of Procedure of the Steering Committee”. She declared that the “Rules” did not allow a second re-election of Hon. Mr. Dr. Haroun Kabadi (Chad).

31. The President interrupted the meeting for a break to enable consultations among the different geopolitical regions.

32. After consultations and subsequent proposals the following Steering Committee members were elected:

- a) Africa: Hon. Ms. Sophia Swartz (Namibia) – Vice-President
- b) Arab Countries: Hon. Mr. Brahim Boulegane (Algeria) – Vice-President
- c) Asia/Pacific: Hon. Mr. Gholamreza Nouri Gezeljeh (Iran) – Vice-President
- d) Europe: Hon. Mr. Mehmet Naci Bostancı (Turkey) – President
- e) Latin America and the Caribbean: [absent]
- f) Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU): N.N. – Vice-President

33. The incoming President, Hon. Mr. Mehmet Naci Bostancı (Turkey), thanked the outgoing President for his valuable activities. He said much more effective work will be possible because of the relevant global problems. He appreciated the adopted Declaration and underlined that Parliament and Parliamentarians have a high responsibility in promoting sustainable development and the commitments of the Declaration. He called for a better infrastructure of the Steering Committee.

34. In his closing remarks, Mr. Rajeb Boulharouf, Chef de Cabinet of the UNCCD secretariat, welcomed the outcome of the eleventh Round Table for Parliamentarians. He highlighted the important responsibility of the Round Table in supporting the UNCCD as a pioneer in the new process between governments and elected country representatives. He appealed to the Parliamentarians to make efficient use of the interactive dialogue session within the framework of the high-level segment and to show the wisdom of Parliaments and MPs in the framing of legislation to protect and rehabilitate land.

35. President Hon. Ms. Dr. Ravza Kavakçı-Kan (Turkey) thanked the RTP participants and all those responsible for the success of the meeting. She congratulated the members of the new Steering Committee upon their election and thanked the former President Hon. Mr. Dr. Haroun Kabadi (Chad) for his work. She reminded the MPs of the technical visit programme, organised by the Turkish authorities on October 22. She appreciated that for the first time an interactive dialogue between Parliamentarians and Ministers was made possible.³ Finally, she laid emphasis on the struggle of Parliaments and Parliamentarians against desertification as well as for the eradication of poverty and the achievement of a planet where our kids could enjoy a better life.

³ The interactive dialogue session took place in the afternoon of October 21. It was co-chaired by Hon. Ms. Dr. Ravza Kavakçı-Kan (Turkey). Several MPs, who participated in the RTP discussions, acted as panellists in the dialogue, among them Hon. Mr. Dr. Haroun Kabadi (Chad), Hon. Ms. Dr. Joyce C. Laboso (Kenya), Hon. Mr. Dr. Ali Bin Saad Al Tokhais (Saudi Arabia) and Hon. Ms. Maria Lourdes Acosta-Alba (Philippines).