

9.10.09

**Report on the Eighth Session of the UNCCD Round Table for
Parliamentarians
Buenos Aires, Argentina, 24 and 25 September 2009**

1. The Eighth Session of the Round Table for Parliamentarians was held on 24-25 September 2009 in Buenos Aires, in the Convention Centre of the Hilton Hotel, in parallel with the ninth Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), entitled:

**The role of Members of Parliament in the efforts to combat desertification:
parliamentary contributions to achieving food security and addressing climate
change in the drylands under the current economic crisis.**

2. Some 40 parliamentarians representing some 20 parliaments from Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America participated in the Round Table, which met at the invitation of the Secretariat of the UNCCD with the best and full support of the Parliament's Chamber of Deputies of Argentina (Cámara de los Diputados de la Nación) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

Day 1: Thursday, 24 September 2009

Opening Ceremony

3. The meeting started at 10.00 hrs with opening remarks from Luc Gnacadja, Executive Secretary of the UNCCD. He welcomed the participants and expressed his deep gratitude to the relevant authorities of Argentine, both at the level of the government and the National Assembly. He said that the involvement of parliamentarians in the UNCCD COP Sessions has been recognized by all as critical in supporting activities undertaken by affected Parties at various levels. He stressed that the decision to discuss on today's important issues such as food security in the drylands but also desertification, land degradation and the effects of drought as they relate to climate change would certainly greatly contribute in defining the priorities when aligning action programmes with some of the main objectives under the UNCCD Ten Year Strategy. He reiterated to the Round Table the importance that the UNCCD Secretariat attaches to the success of the parliamentarians activities in the context of the implementation of the convention.
4. The President of COP 9, Homero Máximo Bibiloni, Argentina's Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, welcomed the parliamentarians. He underlined the relevance of all three Rio conventions, but insisted on their differentiated and autonomous significance and stressed the interrelationship between desertification and climate change. He appealed to the legislators to work for democratic processes, the rule of law and social inclusion, to set aside additional financial means for the combat against desertification, and to enact an enabling political environment with clear and understandable laws.

5. In the name of Eduardo Alfredo Fellner, President of the Chamber of Deputies of Argentina, Hon. Alberto Cantero, chairman of the parliamentary commission for agriculture, said that Argentina has been suffering from the greatest drought with sharp consequences for the top soil, the agricultural production and the rural populations which are often forced to overexploit natural resources. Because of the unfair international system he considered compromises between industrialized and developed countries as being necessary.
6. On behalf of IPU President Theo-Ben Gurirab, Speaker of the National Assembly of Namibia, the Mexican senator Hon. Alonso Díaz Canejo, member of the IPU Executive Committee, highlighted the long and good cooperation between the IPU and the Parliamentary Round Tables since 1998. He referred to IPU's undertakings and resolutions with regard to environmental protection and climate change. He noted that the fight against desertification is very complex and that synergetic efforts between governments, parliaments, civil society, academia and the private sector are needed.
7. The President of the Steering Committee of the Round Table, Hon. Aristides R. Lima, stated that a great topic dominates the countries: the economic crisis combined with the food and environmental crisis. In his view, parliamentarians have a specific responsibility to solve these problems and to work for the implementation of the UNCCD. He stressed that the Parliamentary Network of the UNCCD must be revitalised and announced that the Steering Committee had worked out rules of procedure and a two year parliamentary action programme.

Election of the Bureau and adoption of the agenda

8. After consultations and subsequent proposals the Bureau members were elected, namely: As President Hon. Alberto Cantero (Argentina); as Vice-presidents Hon. Mary R. Mugenyi (Pan-African Parliament) and Hon. Cristina Gutiérrez-Cortines (European Parliament); as rapporteur Hon. Rajkoemar Randjetsingh (Suriname).
9. The proposed agenda was unanimously adopted.

Item I: Panel discussion I: Which policy towards achieving food security in the drylands under the current economic crisis; chaired by Hon. Alberto Cantero (11.30-13.15 hrs.)

10. Prof. Uwe Holtz, facilitator of the Round Table and author of the background document, gave a general introduction on the main topics. (the document is available at www.unccd.int/parliament/docs/XM_parliament_background-eng.pdf)
11. Keynote speaker Dominique Lantieri (FAO) said that food security is one of the most pressing issues for the next decades and that the demand for food will increase because of population pressure, new needs (biofuels), inappropriate land use practices, and land degradation (also induced by climate change). He saw a win-win-situation by relying on sustainable land management based on an agro-ecology approach. In his view UNCCD should move towards a land convention as a sister of the climate convention.
12. The first panellist, Hon. Sammy Wuyaita (Kenya), lamented the serious drought in his country forcing many people to buy imported food. The MP reported that Kenya is

going into the right direction by allocating 10 percent of the national budget to agriculture and said that the last budget provided for an economic stimulus-package by setting aside *inter alia* funds for planting trees or for the rehabilitation of irrigation schemes. He deplored that climate changes were not sufficiently considered.

13. The second panellist, Hon. Kavuri S. Rao (India) highlighted that 90 percent of India's population live in dryland areas suffering from deforestation, over-exploitation and land degradation. He asked for more and better used investments in the areas of food processing industries, national forestry and water policies as well as of anti-desertification measures. With regard to climate change in his view the developed countries should play a more responsible role.
14. Panellist Hon. Nursi Uslu (Turkey) asked the UNCCD to promote further studies on the required knowledge and the financial means. The MP drew the attention to the negative effects of desertification and drought in his country leading to soil erosion. He presented the National Afforestation Action Plan (2008-2012). He stated that the parliamentarians' priority should be to make their voices heard – first to our political parties and then to other relevant authorities like the ongoing Round Table.
15. The two panellists from Argentina, Hon. Claudia Bernazza and Hon. Luis Ilarregui, underlined the paradox and internal problem that Latin America is producing enough food while many poor people are suffering from hunger. In their view desertification is linked to agricultural subsidies in developed countries. Both MPs called for a more just international system. They gave the information that parliamentarians of several countries in the region, among them Argentina and Brazil, founded a parliamentary network against hunger in Latin America.

Afternoon session: Chaired in the beginning by Hon. Mary R. Mugenyi, then by Hon. Alberto Cantero (14.45-18.00 hrs.)

Discussion

16. Burkina Faso opened the general discussion on the first panel. The representative considered Prof. Holtz' background document as a very valuable contribution to the Round Table. He said that at least 5 % of the national budgets should be allocated to agriculture. He appealed to the MPs to act in a responsible way in the sake of future generations and to send a clear message to the climate summit in Copenhagen.
17. Senegal laid emphasis on the issue of "securitization (land degradation can undermine national and regional security). He stressed that the still cultivable lands should be used and that FAO should support the countries concerned. He asked for better concepts which need more studies (for instance on the cotton's impacts on land) and specific approaches.
18. Another delegate from Kenya joined all those considering food security as being a very important issue. For him there is no future if we don't combat desertification. He raised the question whether the parliamentarians are really ready to do what is necessary.
19. President Cantero closed the discussion by recommending that sustainable development should be the guiding principle and that the productive capacity of land and soil must be enhanced or restored respectively.

Item II: Panel discussion II: How can the UNCCD contribute to the global response to climate change?

20. In a keynote address Ms. Rocio Lichte (UNFCCC) meant that a particular focus should be laid on developing countries being particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change and that Copenhagen must deliver clear climate arrangements. She insisted on appropriate adaptation and mitigation possibilities enabled by sustainable land management. She emphasized that the UNCCD can make an important contribution to solving climate change problems.
21. Hon. Cristina Gutiérrez-Cortines (European Parliament) opened the panel discussion by laying emphasis on the industrial emissions and linking them to the negotiations in Copenhagen. She highlighted the interrelated problems of the economic crisis, the climatic changes and poverty. She underlined the relevance of agriculture for mitigating green house gas emissions through carbon sequestration and asked for a scientific work close to reality.
22. Panellist Hon. Yidong Gu (China) explained the situation in his country by pointing out that China, a large developing country, representing 22 % of the world population and just 10 % of the arable land, suffers from great land degradation and climate change problems. The People's Congress adopted a cleaner production law, a grassland and forestry law as well as a renewable energy law. He called on developed countries to increase development assistance and to invest more in climate change.
23. For the third panellist, Hon. Modou Diagne Fada (Senegal), it is evident that climate change leads to desertification and desertification leads to climate change. Whereas the developed countries have at their disposal sufficient means to deal with climate related problems, the situation in developing countries is not at all satisfactory. In his view UNCCD should continue to support the Parliamentary Round Tables which must lobby more efficiently for the cause of desertification.
24. The general discussion was opened by India. He addressed energy, transport, desertification and adequate land use issues and underlined that there are common but differentiated responsibilities, also referring to the private sector.
25. The representative of the European Parliament said that soil and desertification have to be on the Copenhagen agenda. She pleaded for better and easier technology transfer.
26. The representative of the Pan-African Parliament insisted on the empowerment of farmers. She asked the MPs to push their governments to strengthen role and power of the rural population.

Item III: Rules of Procedure of the Steering Committee

27. The President of the Steering Committee, Hon. Aristides Lima, presented the draft of the rules of procedure prepared by the Steering Committee – rules which shall apply to any session of the Steering Committee of the Parliamentary network of the UNCCD. He underlined that the Steering Committee was established with the two main objectives of (i) helping to translate commitments into real actions in respect of the implementation of the Convention in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification and land degradation and (ii) assessing the role and increasing the accountability of

governments and relevant multilateral organizations. As regards the Statutes which are also needed, he suggested that a finalized version should not be submitted before further feedbacks have been received.

28. The Rules were widely discussed. Several questions were asked – for instance referring to the concept of geopolitical groups where the parliamentary round tables follow the usual practice of the IPU. Several delegates made many proposals on the substance. It was decided that President Lima should work out a draft for the next day together with some interested delegates.

Election of a drafting Committee for the Buenos Aires Declaration

29. The following parliamentarians were elected and asked to work out the draft:

Africa: Hon. Agnes Chatitwa (Malawi)

Asia/Pacific : Hon. Kavuri S. Rao (India)

Europe (Twelve +): Hon. Nuri Uslu (Turkey)

Latin America and the Caribbean: Hon. Luis Ilarregui (Argentina)

With Hon. Rajkoemar Randjetsingh (Suriname) as rapporteur and Prof. Uwe Holtz as facilitator

The meeting adjourned at 18:00 hrs. In the evening, the Chamber of Deputies of Argentina invited the participants of the Round Table to attend a reception and a guided tour of the parliamentary building.

Day 2: Friday, 25 September 2009, chaired by Hon. Alberto Cantero. The Meeting started at 9:45 hrs.

Item IV: Presentation of upcoming activities and review of the draft Declaration of Buenos Aires

A) Upcoming activities

30. Facilitator Prof. Holtz introduced the text of the two-year parliamentary action programme which was inspired by the Steering Committee meeting held in Praia, Cape Verde, on 1 December 2008. He referred to the commitments and actions in the following four areas: (1) Contributions achieving food security. (2) Mobilize public opinion and raise awareness. (3) Improvement of the quality of governance in agriculture in the drylands. (4) Climate, sustainable land management and post-Kyoto. He reported that it was the Steering Committee's own wish to show more guidance in strengthening the Parliamentary Network of UNCCD, to look for a better follow-up of the declarations of the Round Tables, and to monitor the work of parliamentarians.
31. Burkina Faso proposed to focus the future activities on the areas 1, 2 and 4. He considered it as necessary to meet again in about a year and to look thoroughly after a follow-up. He emphasized the need to create a UNCCD focal point in every parliament.
32. Senegal appreciated the good ideas of the paper, but insisted on another title: "Commitments and future actions" (agreed). He pleaded for an extraordinary parliamentary meeting in the next year.

33. Cape Verde welcomed Prof. Holtz' text. He was in favour of an annual meeting, too, and stressed the relevance of the 3rd area. In his view it is also necessary to strengthen the institutional capacities of parliaments and to strengthen the regional cooperation (agreed).
34. China asked for an annual report on the state of the art.
35. The Pan-African Parliament said that for the sake of the poor population 10 % (not 5 %) of the national budgets should be allocated to agriculture (a majority of the delegates were in favour of this proposal). She meant that the text should not be shortened and that all four areas are important and interrelated. (It was agreed to amend the text by stating that the first two areas are of primordial importance, but to maintain all 4 specific areas.)
36. Brazil stressed the need to focus on food security in the context of desertification. He favoured the idea of other delegates to meet more frequently. (The idea to have inter sessional meeting was widely accepted.)
37. In order to take seriously the self-commitments, Cameroun and Cape Verde supported the proposal to create a UNCCD focal point in all the parliaments (agreed).
38. In a written form seven delegates from Argentina, Cape Verde, Chile and the European Parliament submitted two recommendations to be incorporated in the text: (1) Parliamentary declarations emphasizing as priority the control of desertification and land degradation in state policies should be promoted. (2) A database of successful experiences and good practices in desertification control should be set up in order to be shared by all countries.
39. Mansour N'Diaye, Chief of Cabinet of the UNCCD Secretariat, remembered that this text with upcoming activities is timely and helpful and it will support the Convention and 10-year strategic plan adopted in 2007 by COP 8. In the Secretariat's view there must be a follow-up to the declarations adopted by the parliamentarians acknowledging that financial implications may be a consequence of different activities. He said that accurate indicators would help evaluate the different activities implemented by parliaments and parliamentarians.
40. The European Parliament lamented that parliaments and parliamentarians are short in action regarding land degradation and desertification. She shared the opinion that concrete follow-up actions as set out in the text and put forward during the discussion are necessary.
41. The amended and agreed text "Commitments and future actions of Parliamentarians" can be found under www.unccd.int/parliament/docs/Parliament_up-coming_ENG-adopted.pdf.

B) Declaration of Buenos Aires

42. The Rapporteur Hon. Rajkoemar Randjetsingh paid tribute to the Drafting Committee for having prepared the text and thanked the facilitator for his valuable work. Then he read the whole draft of the Buenos Aires Declaration in English (interpreted into the two other languages of the Round Table, French and Spanish).

43. President Cantero asked if there were any comments or amendments – apart from the already agreed formulation that at least 10 percent of the national budgets should be allocated to agriculture. Nobody asked the floor. Consequently the Declaration of Buenos Aires was adopted by consensus.

(The Declaration is available at www.unccd.int/parliament/docs/Buenos_A_-_Declaration_2009-09-25_final_version.pdf)

Item III resumed: Rules of Procedure of the Steering Committee

44. Steering Committee President Hon. Aristides Lima presented the new draft of the rules elaborated during the previous evening by a small group of Round Table members.

45. After further fruitful deliberations the rules were adopted. Among the various accepted amendments the following ones highlighted: The Steering Committee, elected for two years, will have one representative per the different geopolitical regions: Africa, Arab region, Asia and Pacific, Europe (Twelve +), Latin America and Caribbean. The President shall be elected for one term renewable once; the presidency should rotate among the different geopolitical regions. Among the members of the Steering Committee there will be at least two members of each gender. The UNCCD Secretariat shall receive or prepare relevant documents necessary to the deliberations of the Steering Committee and shall distribute them to its members as far as possible in English, French and Spanish. (The rules are available at www.unccd.int/parliament/docs/Rules_of_procedures_ENG-adopted_version_25.09.09.pdf)

Election of a new Steering Committee

46. After deliberations and subsequent proposals the following Steering Committee members were elected according to the following geopolitical groups:

- a. Africa: Hon. Aristides R. Lima, Cape Verde (President of the Steering Committee)
- b. Arab Group: N. N., Saudi-Arabia (Vice-President)
- c. Asia/Pacific: Hon. Yidong Gu, China (Vice-President)
- d. Europe (Twelve +): Hon. Cristina Gutiérrez-Cortines, European Parliament (Vice-President)
- e. Latin America and the Caribbean: Hon. Adela Segarra, Argentina (Vice-President)
- f. Inter-Parliamentary Union: N. N. (Vice-President)

After a break from 14:45 – 17:00 hrs. the meeting was resumed at 17:00 hrs.

Closing Ceremony

47. Rapporteur Hon. Rajkoemar Randjetsingh highlighted the main parts and proposals of the Declaration of Buenos Aires, *inter alia*: The enactment of enabling legislation is a key tool for combating desertification, the protection of human rights including the right to food, and environmental governance at the national level. Because of its relevance to food security, poverty reduction and political stability, as well as to sustainable development and the environment, agriculture needs a re-evaluation in the political arena; parliamentarians in developed and developing countries have to play their roles. Parliaments should strive to ensure that food, agricultural trade and overall trade policies are conducive to fostering food security for all through a fair market-oriented world trade system embedded in a sustainable, socially balanced and fair globalization. Land and soil can make a difference in the fight against climate change. Sustainable land management

has significant potential to mitigate climate change. It is recommended to promote ways avoiding royalties and other levies for the transfer of clean technologies. Desertification and land degradation issues deserve global policy attention and the needs of drylands must be fully integrated into the Copenhagen Protocol. The initiative for a Global Green New Deal in Copenhagen should be supported on the condition that SLM becomes an integral part of it and of future climate protection strategies. A Special International Environment Fund should be created for this purpose.

48. Luc Gnacadja, UNCCD Executive Secretary, welcomed the “Declaration of Buenos Aires” and congratulated the parliamentarians for the excellent conclusion of the Round Table hoping and trusting that the MPs and the newly elected Steering Committee will fully engage in materializing the various recommendations and self-commitments. He very much welcomed the suggestion to have inter sessional get together to assess the achievements made by parliamentarians on various activities in following-up to the outcomes of the Buenos Aires meeting. He reiterated the full readiness of the UNCCD Secretariat to continue supporting the parliamentary program of activities.

49. Hon. Alberto Cantero said that the Chamber of Deputies of Argentina was very honoured to host the Parliamentary Round Table. In his view, the Declaration of Buenos Aires means a strong obligation for his own parliament. He pleaded for a more sustainable world where there is more peace and less egoism and where democracy, freedom and social justice are consolidated. He thanked to all those who made possible and facilitated the Round Table.

President Cantero closed the Parliamentary Round Table at 17:30 hrs.

Addendum: On 30 September, Hon. Adela Segarra (Argentina), Vice-President of the Steering Committee, presented the Declaration before the Committee on the Whole of COP 9. The COP decided (ICCD/COP(9)/L.15) to take note of the “Declaration of members of parliament on their role in efforts to combat desertification: parliamentary contributions to achieving food security and addressing climate change in the drylands under the current economic crisis,” and decided to include their declaration as an annex to the COP report (see www.unccd.int/cop/officialdocs/cop9/pdf/18eng.pdf).