

The previous four Round Tables of Members of Parliament on the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

Achievements and Challenges

Uwe Holtz¹

This paper has been prepared for the Fifth Parliamentary Round Table to take place as a parallel event of the sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), scheduled from 25 August to 5 September 2003 in Havana, Cuba. The Round Table will take place in Havana on 3 and 4 September 2003, and has been jointly organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (www.ipu.org), with the assistance of the Government of Cuba.

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¹ Prof. Dr. Uwe Holtz teaches political science at Bonn University; he is a development consultant and member of the UNCCD Panel of Eminent Personalities to consider the poverty-environment nexus. From 1994 to 2000 he served on the Board of the International Food Policy Research Institute, Washington, D.C. From 1978 to 1999 he belonged to the supervisory board of the EBG Steel Company for Electro-Magnetic Materials, Bochum. As a member of parliament, he presided from 1992 to 1995 over the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, France, and chaired the German Parliamentary Committee on Development Cooperation from 1974 to 1994. Between 1973 and 1992 Prof. Dr. Holtz was active in the Inter-Parliamentary Union (i.a. as Vice-President of the Decolonisation Committee and of the Economic and Social Committee). E-mail: uholtz@aol.com; Internet Web page: <http://hss.ulb.uni-bonn.de/uholtz>.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACP	Africa Caribbean Pacific
AU	African Union
CBO	community-based organization
COP	Conference of the Parties
CRIC	Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention
CST	Committee on Science and Technology
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GM	Global Mechanism
IDA	International Development Association
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MP	Member of Parliament
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NGO	non-governmental organization
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PNoUNCCD	Parliamentary Network on the UNCCD
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development

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I. THE INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT ROLE OF PARLIAMENTS

More and more it is remembered that parliaments – and not only civil society organisations and NGOs – play a critical role in a country's development. If a country wants to implement reform, adjustment or poverty reduction programmes, there is a very important group within the country that must not be left out of the consultations and that is the parliament and parliamentarians as elected representatives of civil society.² The same hold true for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) outcomes.

As the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) States in its *Universal Declaration on Democracy*, democracy is founded on the right of everyone to take part in the management of public affairs.³ It therefore requires the existence of representative institutions at all levels and, in particular, a parliament which has the requisite powers and means to express the will of the people by legislating and overseeing government action.

During its 108th Conference (Santiago de Chile, April 2003), the IPU underlined the natural function of parliaments as one of mediation between the public and international organisations and institutions. The Conference emphasised that parliaments represent the basis for good governance grounded on democratic institutions that are responsive to the needs of the people, the rule of law, anti-corruption measures, gender equality and the need for a favourable atmosphere and environment for investment.⁴

Knowing that the parliaments in the different countries of the world play notes ranging from weak rubber stamp parliaments to strong transformative parliaments,⁵ the tendency for donors and international organisations to engage with civil society and NGOs but organisations to neglect parliaments is neither acceptable nor prudent. They have to engage with parliaments, who have the last word on laws and budgets and are the representative institutions providing the political base for policy and institutional arrangements.

Even if the WSSD Plan of Implementation does repeat the Rio “triangle” of sustainable development – economic development, social development and environmental protection – the triangle was transformed into a “quadrilateral” paradigm by the addition of the political dimension:

“Good governance within each country and at the international level is essential for sustainable development. At the domestic level, sound environmental, social and economic policies, democratic institutions ... are the basis for sustainable development. (...) Peace, security, stability and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms,

² See, for example, Shantayanan Devarajan, David R. Dollar and Torgny Holmgren, Editors, “Aid and Reform in Africa”, Development Research Group, World Bank, Washington D.C. 2001 - see also <http://www.worldbank.org/research/aid/africa/intro.htm>

³ The Declaration was adopted without a vote by the Inter-Parliamentary Council at its 161st session (Cairo, 16 September 1997). The Declaration may be found in Inter-Parliamentary Union, “Democracy: Its Principles and Achievements”, Geneva 1998, P. 3-8; see also <http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/161-dem.htm>

⁴ IPU. Parliaments' role in strengthening democratic institutions and human development in a fragmented world. Resolution adopted unanimously by the 108th Conference (Santiago de Chile, 11 April 2003), available at <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/108-1.htm>.

⁵ John K. Johnson and Robert T. Nakamura, A concept paper on legislatives and good governance, a paper prepared for the United Nations Development Programme, New York July 1999 See also <http://www.undp.org>.

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including the right to development, as well as respect for cultural diversity, are essential for achieving sustainable development and ensuring that sustainable development benefits all.”⁶

WSSD Agenda 21 and the Plan of Implementation promote the integration of the four components of sustainable human development as interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars. The Johannesburg Summit acknowledged the UNCCD as an important tool for poverty eradication; it also stressed the need to mobilize adequate and predictable financial resources for the implementation of the UNCCD.⁷ Parliaments can contribute to providing for effective policy formulation, coordination, implementation and monitoring of the processes of sustainable human development including of the UNCCD process.

The UNCCD implementation process will contribute to realising the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in particular the following: ensure environmental sustainability, eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, promote gender equality and empower women.⁸

II. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNCCD⁹ AND PARLIAMENTARY (IPU) INVOLVEMENT

Desertification means¹⁰ degradation of land and vegetation, soil erosion and the loss of topsoil and fertile land in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, caused primarily by human activities and climatic variations.¹¹ Drought can trigger or aggravate desertification. The term “desertification” (somewhat misleadingly) does not apply to hyper-arid zones (deserts).

Birth of the Convention in 1994

The United Nations Conference on Desertification (UNCOD) held at Nairobi in September 1977, addressed desertification as a worldwide problem for the first time and adopted a Plan of Action to Combat Desertification. In 1992, the United Nations General Assembly, as requested by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), adopted Resolution

⁶ WSSD, Plan of Implementation, Arts. 4 and 5 - available online at http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/documents/summit_docs/2309_planfinal.htm. The reference to cultural diversity underlines the relevance of the cultural dimension of development.

⁷ Hama Arba Diallo, Executive Secretary of the UNCCD, was the first to be happy about this outcome.

⁸ The goals are based on the UN Millennium Declaration (September 2000), and the United Nations General Assembly has approved them as part of the Secretary General’s road map towards implementing the Declaration.

⁹ Vol. 4, No. 162, 25 November 2002, p. 1f UNCCD Important Dates, online at <http://www.unccd.int/knowledge/importantDates.php>, and Earth Negotiations Bulletin, International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) - see also <http://www.iisd.ca/linkages/desert/cric1>

¹⁰ UN Convention to Combat Desertification, art.1 - available at <http://www.unccd.int>. “Desertification means land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities.” Jagdish C. Katyal / Paul L.G. Vlek: Desertification - Concept, Causes and Amelioration, *Discussion Papers in Development Policy*, No. 33, ZEF, Bonn, October 2000, p. 16 propose the following definition: “Desertification is a condition of human-induced land degradation that occurs in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid regions (...) and leads to a persistent decline in economic productivity (>15% of the potential) of useful biota related to land use or a production system. Climatic variations intensify the decline in productivity, restorative management moderates it.”

¹¹ Land over-exploitation, poor management of grazing areas and livestock, mechanised farming, bad irrigation practices, mismanagement of inputs and neglect of land improvement, inappropriate land use systems and policies, illegal and excessive logging, bush and forest fires, deforestation due to population increase trigger land degradation. Along with these anthropocentric factors, a range of natural factors are believed to influence the process of land degradation: year-round aridity, high variability in rainfall, recurrent drought etc.

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47/188 calling for the establishment of an intergovernmental negotiating committee for the elaboration of a convention to combat desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa.

On 17 June 1994, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)¹² was adopted in Paris. June 17 became the world combat desertification day. The preparations had included discussion of the programme and budget of a permanent secretariat, the functions of and administrative arrangements for financial mechanism under the Convention, the Global Mechanism (GM), and the establishment of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST).

Considerable progress was made, especially on scientific and technological cooperation, but some important issues, such as the size and membership of the Conference of the Parties Bureau, the host institutions and some functions of the GM, remained unresolved.

UNCCD enters into force in 1996

In December 1996, the UNCCD entered into force, 90 days after the 50th ratification was received. There are currently 186 Parties to the Convention.¹³

First Conference of the Parties in 1997

The First Conference of the Parties (COP 1) met at Rome, from 29 September to 10 October 1997. Rules governing the COP and its subsidiary bodies were established, the functions of the Global Mechanism set out. Delegates selected Bonn, as the location for the Convention's Permanent secretariat and designated the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) as the organization to administer the Global Mechanism. One plenary meeting was devoted to a dialogue between NGOs and delegates. Delegates subsequently adopted a proposal that a plenary meeting at future COPs be devoted to similar NGO dialogues.¹⁴ Whereas the relevance of NGOs was recognised, no similar recognition was given to parliaments or parliamentarians.

Second Conference of the Parties in 1998

Parties met for COP 2 at Dakar, from 30 November to 11 December 1998, with the CST meeting in parallel. Delegates approved arrangements for the institutional linkage between the Convention and the United Nations secretariat and the headquarters agreement with the German Government. Central and Eastern European countries were invited to submit a draft regional implementation annex to COP 3.

¹² See <http://www.unccd.int/convention/menu.php>.

¹³ 185 States and the European Community - see <http://www.unccd.int/convention/ratif/doiif.php>.

¹⁴ To date, over 650 non-governmental organisations have been accredited with observer status to the COP. There is an International NGO Network on Desertification and Drought (RIOD), which is a global network of non-governmental and community based organizations in the area of combating desertification. RIOD mission is to promote and strengthen the participation of civil society in the implementation of the Convention in order to combat desertification and drought at all levels, in particular through national action programmes see <http://www.riodccd.org>.

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A meeting of parliamentarians on the UNCCD was organised for the first time in parallel to COP 2 on December 7. Some 31 parliamentarians from 18 countries participated (see Table 1) in the First Parliamentary Round Table at the invitation of the UNCCD secretariat, the National Assembly of Senegal and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. They discussed the process of implementation of the Convention and issued a Declaration on the *Process of implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification*. The secretariat moved to Bonn in January 1999.

Third Conference of the Parties in 1999

Parties met for COP 3 at Recife, from 15-26 November 1999, with the CST meeting in parallel. The COP approved the long-negotiated memorandum of understanding between the COP and IFAD regarding the Convention's Global Mechanism. It decided to establish an ad hoc working group to review and analyse in depth the reports on national, subregional and regional action programmes to draw conclusions and propose concrete recommendations on further steps in the implementation of the Convention. Delegates also agreed to continue consultations on the additional draft regional implementation annex for Central and Eastern Europe, with a view to adopting it at COP 4. They noted the need for a declaration on the commitment to enhance implementation of the Convention and decided to invite proposals for the formulation of such a declaration for consideration and adoption at the next COP.

On the margins of COP 3, some 41 parliamentarians from 20 countries met on 22 - 23 November for the Second Round Table of Members of Parliament at the invitation of the UNCCD secretariat and the National Congress of Brazil, with the full support of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (see Table 1). They issued a declaration on the *Role of members of parliament in designing educational, scientific and cultural policies for the Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification*.

Fourth Conference of the Parties in 2000

Parties met for COP 4 from 11 to 22 December 2000 at Bonn. The CST met in tandem with the COP. The Conference's notable achievements were the adoption of the fifth regional Annex for Eastern and Central Europe, commencement of work by the ad hoc working group to review implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification, initiation of evaluation of modalities for a committee to review implementation of the Convention submission of proposals to improve the work of the CST and the adoption of a decision on the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Council initiative, to explore the best options for GEF support for UNCCD implementation.

In the context of COP 4, the Third Round Table of Members of Parliament took place on 12 and 13 December and was organized by the UNCCD secretariat and the German Federal Parliament, with the full support of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The 36 parliamentarians from 21 countries (see Table 1) discussed and adopted a declaration on *The support of members of parliament for the strengthening of the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the identification of domestic revenue-neutral funding sources and the enhancement of technical and financial assistance to the countries most affected by desertification*.

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Fifth Conference of the Parties in 2001

The Parties met from 1 to 13 October 2001 at Geneva; as usual, the CST met in tandem with the COP. The COP focused on setting out the modalities of work for the two-year interval before the next COP, scheduled for 2003. Progress was made in a number of areas, most notably the establishment of a Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) as a subsidiary body of the COP, the identification of modalities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the CST, and the enhancement of the financial base of the UNCCD following strong support for a proposal by the GEF to designate land degradation as another focal area for funding. The UNCCD Panel of Eminent Personalities to Consider the Poverty-Environment Nexus met in parallel to the COP.¹⁵

The Fourth Round Table of Parliamentarians took place at Geneva on 4 and 5 October 2001. Some 26 parliamentarians from 25 countries participated (see Table 1), invited by the United Nations through the IPU, and with the assistance of the Government of Switzerland. At the end of the Round Table, they approved a *Declaration on the role of members of parliament in addressing the linkages between poverty and sustainable development, particularly desertification, within the framework of the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification*.

World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (26 August to 4 September 2002, Johannesburg) acknowledged the UNCCD as one of the tools for poverty eradication and called on the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to become a financial mechanism of the UNCCD. In October 2002, the Second Assembly of the GEF at Beijing, adopted a decision to designate land degradation as its fifth focal area and to establish the GEF as a financial mechanism of the UNCCD. Advocacy was carried out around the message of the UNCCD Panel of Eminent Personalities to Consider the Poverty-Environment Nexus, in particular the “Agadez Call” and the “Report”,¹⁶ and it was promoted through side events and media channels as well as through informal meetings and discussions.

On the occasion of the Parliamentary Meeting organized jointly by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Parliament of South Africa (Johannesburg, 29 to 30 August 2002), members of parliament (MPs) deplore in their declaration “*Toward sustainability: implementing Agenda 21*” that in spite of progress on many fronts, the ten-year old Agenda 21 remains for the most part unfulfilled. Explicitly, they name land degradation and desertification. They pledge their continued support for Agenda 21 as the blueprint for parliamentarians working for a more prosperous, equitable, and sustainable world, and to continue to work towards ratification and implementation of multilateral environmental agreements.¹⁷

¹⁵UNCCD, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification: A useful tool for sustainable development and poverty alleviation, Report of the Panel of Eminent Personalities, Bonn 2002 see <http://www.unccd.int/meetings/global/agadez2002/report-eng.pdf>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ The Parliamentary Declaration, online at: <http://www.ipu.org>.

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First Meeting of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention in 2002

The first meeting of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation (CRIC) of the Convention took place from 11 to 22 November at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) headquarters at Rome. Innovative solutions to combat desertification were identified and shared. A report was adopted and will be submitted to COP 6.

There was no parliamentary participation, whereas NGOs were invited to participate.

Sixth Conference of the Parties in 2003

In September 2003, the Parties will meet in Havana, Cuba. The decisions to make the GEF a financial mechanism of the UNCCD are to be approved by the COP. In parallel to COP 6, the Fifth Round Table of Parliamentarians will be held with the invited members of parliament from 31 countries (see Table 1).

The most important lesson delivered by the historical overview is that combating desertification and promoting sustainable development in general at the national and international levels requires overall strong political commitment.

III. THE FOUR PARLIAMENTARY ROUND TABLES

Starting with the second UNCCD Conference of the Parties (COP 2), the COPs were accompanied by Parliamentary Round Tables (Rd. T.) organized by the UNCCD secretariat with the full support of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the host country's parliament and/or government (see Table 1).

1 st Rd. T. (COP 2) 1998-Dakar 31 MPs from 8 countries	2 nd Rd. T. (COP 3) 1999-Recife 41 MPs from 20 countries	3 rd Rd. T. (COP 4) 2000-Bonn 36 MPs from 21 countries	4 th Rd. T. (COP 5) 2001-Geneva 26 MPs from 25 countries
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Some 121 MPs, among them 21 women (17 per cent),¹⁸ and one Member of the European Parliament participated in at least one of the four Round Tables. They came from 47 countries (of which 31 developing countries).

In their respective parliaments or parliamentary groups, many of the participating MPs were high ranking MPs and/or specifically involved in (sustainable) development matters. They were, for instance, (vice-) presidents of their parliaments, and chairpersons, or at least members, of the development, environmental or agricultural committees.

In relation to other comparable IPU parliamentary activities,¹⁹ one may conclude that the number of MPs and countries, the regional representation and the gender participation ratio of the

¹⁸ Worldwide, women account for about 15% of parliaments, a share that is growing at a snail's pace see <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>.

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UNCCD Parliamentary Round Tables is relatively satisfactory. However, improvement should be sought including through sending informations and invitations for future meetings earlier to ensure greater participation.

With respect to the continuity, it can be said that 112 MPs participated in one Round Table. 5 MPs participated twice, representing the Parliaments of Brazil (2x), China, Mexico and Tunisia, and 4 MPs three times, representing the Parliaments of Australia, Cuba, Germany and Mali. For more continuity should be aimed while acknowledging that parliamentary life often is volatile and that some parliaments cannot afford the travel costs (it is not easy to find sponsors).

Table 1
Four Parliamentary Round Tables (Rd. T.)
Countries and number of participants²⁰

Country	1 st Rd. T. (COP 2) 1998 Dakar	2 nd Rd. T. (COP 3) 1999 Recife	3 rd Rd. T. (COP 4) 2000 Bonn	4 th Rd. T. (COP 5) 2001 Geneva	5 th Rd. T. (COP 6) 2003 ²¹ Havana
1. Algeria		1		1	<i>x</i>
2. Angola		1	1		<i>x</i>
3. Argentina				1	
4. Australia	1	1	1		<i>x</i>
5. Belgium				1	
6. Benin				1	<i>x</i>
7. Brazil	1	18	1	1	<i>x</i>
8. Botswana	1				
9. Bulgaria			2	1	<i>x</i>
10. Burkina Faso				1	<i>x</i>
11. Burundi					<i>x</i>
12. Cape Verde				1	<i>x</i>
13. China			1	1	<i>x</i>
14. Congo, Dem. Rep. of the					<i>x</i>
15. Costa Rica		2			
16. Cuba		1	1	1	<i>x</i>
17. Egypt					<i>x</i>
18. El Salvador			4		
19. France		1	1	1	
20. Gambia	1				
21. Germany	1	1	10		<i>x</i>
22. Greece				1	
23. India		1		1	<i>x</i>
24. Italy	1	2			<i>x</i>
25. Jamaica	1	1		1	<i>x</i>
26. Japan	1		2	1	
27. Kazakhstan				1	

¹⁹ For example the preparatory meeting for the Third Inter-Parliamentary Conference on Security and Co-operation (CSCM) in the Mediterranean, Ljubljana, 12 and 13 March 1999, which was attended by some 50 members of 19 countries from the category of main participants to the CSCM process, five associate participants and two observers.

²⁰ The information found in various documents differs slightly. The data used is that provided by the UNCCD secretariat.

²¹ By a cross indicates countries from which MPs have been invited (as at 12 May 2003).

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Country	1 st Rd. T. (COP 2) 1998 Dakar	2 nd Rd. T. (COP 3) 1999 Recife	3 rd Rd. T. (COP 4) 2000 Bonn	4 th Rd. T. (COP 5) 2001 Geneva	5 th Rd. T. (COP 6) 2003 ²² Havana
28. Kenya					<i>x</i>
29. Kyrgyzstan				1	
30. Libyan Arab Jamahiriya					<i>x</i>
31. Luxembourg					<i>x</i>
32. Malawi		1			
33. Mali	1	1	1	1	<i>x</i>
34. Mexico	1	1			
35. Mozambique	2				
36. Namibia	1		1		<i>x</i>
37. Niger	1				
38. Nigeria			2		<i>x</i>
39. Peru		1			
40. Portugal			1		
41. Romania		1			
42. Russian Federation	1		1		<i>x</i>
43. Senegal	13	2		1	<i>x</i>
44. South Africa	1	1		1	<i>x</i>
45. Spain	1	1	1		<i>x</i>
46. Switzerland	1			1	
47. Tunisia			1	1	
48. Uganda			1		<i>x</i>
49. Ukraine				1	
50. United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland			1	1	
51. United States of America			1		<i>x</i>
52. Venezuela				2	<i>x</i>
53. Zimbabwe		1	1		<i>x</i>
European Parliament		1			<i>x</i>
Total MPs	31	41	36	26	
Total (Rd. Ts. I-IV) 53 Countries (31 of them developing countries) ²³	18 (11)	20 (14)	21 (11)	25 (17)	31 (23)
Regional representation, countries from:					
Africa	8	7	7	8	17
Asia	1	1	2	5	2
LAC	3	6	3	5	4
Others	6	6	9	7	8

²² By a cross indicates countries from which MPs have been invited (as at 12 May 2003).

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The IPU, in particular its Committee on Sustainable Development supported all the four Parliamentary Round Tables. Important outcomes of the four Round Tables are described in the remainder of this chapter.²⁴

With their Declaration on *the process of implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification*,²⁵ adopted at the First Round Table at Dakar in 1998, parliamentarians recognised the importance of the Convention to Combat Desertification and its implementation at the national level. They underscored the fact that damages to the environment were essentially man-made and that environmental deterioration was a concern for all. They also (a) acknowledged the importance of working towards the development of public policies for allowing the strengthening of activities related to conservation and sustainable use of land resources (b) the adoption or strengthening of environmental legislation (c) the promotion of policies to strengthen institutional capacity (d) the protection of natural resources (e) the development of environmental education programmes and public awareness measures and (f) the promotion of the participation of women in decision-making processes (see also Box 1 and Table 2).

In March 2000, the IPU Committee on Sustainable Development reviewed²⁶ the text of the final declaration adopted by members of parliament participating in the Second Round Table (1999, Recife) on their *Role in designing educational, scientific and cultural policies for the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification*.²⁷

While it welcomed the declaration and its emphasis on the strengthening of educational, scientific and cultural policies addressing the causes and negative effects of desertification, the Committee issued a word of caution about the call made in the declaration for the establishment of a follow-up mechanism in the form of an open-ended high-level Forum of Members of Parliament engaged in the advancement of the Convention that would meet concurrently with each session of the Conference of Parties (see also Table 2). The Committee requested the IPU Secretary General to work with the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification on the proposed Forum to ensure that this initiative did not lead to the establishment of yet another separate parliamentary body, thus diluting efforts by the world parliamentary community to raise awareness globally on the impact of desertification on sustainable development.

The declaration adopted by the Third Round Table of Members of Parliament held in Bonn on 12 to 13 December 2000 in parallel with the Fourth Conference of Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, focuses on *the support of members of parliament to the strengthening of the implementation of the Convention, the identification of domestic revenue-neutral funding sources and the enhancement of technical and financial assistance to the countries most affected by desertification*.²⁸ Among other things, it advocates the creation within the Global Environment Facility of an additional funding instrument for the implementation of the Convention.

²³ As listed by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Development Assistance Committee, see OECD DAC, *Development Cooperation 2002 Report*, Paris 2003, p. 327.

²⁴ IPU, Report of the Committee for Sustainable Development, CL/164/13(c)-R.1, 3 March 1999.

²⁵ Annex I of this report.

²⁶ IPU, Report of the Committee for Sustainable Development, CL/166/16(d)-R.1, 3 March 2000.

²⁷ Annex II of this report.

²⁸ Annex III of this report.

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In addition, the decision was taken to set up a High-level Forum of Members of Parliament, a sort of permanent bureau of the Round Table designed to ensure effective follow-up to the recommendations made at the meeting (see also Table 2). Lastly, the assistance of the Inter-Parliamentary Union was sought with regard to technical support for the Forum, the holding of the Fourth Round Table and the dissemination of the declaration.

Members of the IPU Committee on Sustainable Development agreed – under the heading of “Desertification”²⁹ – that the declaration should be submitted to the Council of the IPU for endorsement and recommended that the IPU provide further technical assistance to the secretariat of the Convention for the holding of future parliamentary round tables. One member felt that information as to the holding of the Round Table had been sent to parliaments too late and that invitations for future meetings should be sent earlier to ensure better participation.

As for monitoring of recommendations made at the Round Table, it was explained that the round tables were meant to allow exchange of information but were not to be viewed as an international parliamentary monitoring mechanism since appropriate parliamentary oversight took place at the national level.

At the fourth edition of the Round Table of Parliamentarians on the UNCCD in 2001³⁰, legislators from countries affected by desertification, invited by the United Nations through the IPU, had the opportunity to give their views on the implementation of this international instrument.

At the end of the Round Table, the participating MPs approved a Declaration *on The role of members of parliament in addressing the linkages between poverty and sustainable development, particularly desertification, within the framework of the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification*.³¹ The declaration was then presented to the Conference of Parties which took note of it with appreciation and decided to include it in its report.

The attention of members of the IPU Committee for Sustainable Development was drawn to a recommendation in the declaration by which participating MPs requested the States Parties to the Convention to designate the Global Environment Facility (GEF) as an operational financial mechanism of the UNCCD, and also requested that the GEF, at its next assembly in Beijing in October 2002, make desertification a fully fledged GEF focal area.

In this connection, and in view of the keen interest shown by the UNCCD secretariat for parliamentary support through the IPU, the Committee suggested that the IPU approach the UNCCD secretariat with a view to organising a parliamentary event during the GEF Assembly, in order to press for the implementation of the recommendations of the Parliamentary Round Table declaration regarding GEF funding of the UNCCD.

²⁹ IPU, Report of the Committee for Sustainable Development, CL/168/13(d)-R.1, 14 March 2001.

³⁰ IPU, Report of the Committee for Sustainable Development, CL/170/13(d)-R.1, 20 March 2002.

³¹ Annex IV of this report.

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Box 1 Some anti-desertification measures propagated by the four Parliamentary Round Tables

1. Measures designed to combat desertification directly and to promote sustainable management of natural resources
 - a) erosion control
 - b) conservation and sustainable use of land resources
 - c) rehabilitation of degraded land
 - d) better land, water and river basin management
 - e) establishment of sustainable irrigation facilities to secure stable water supplies
 - f) sustainable forest management and effective reforestation programmes
 - g) use of modern and safe bio-technologies to disseminate drought-resistant species.
2. Measures designed to promote indirectly the conservation and sustainable management of natural resources
 - a) land use planning and adequate land tenure policy
 - b) sustainable agricultural policies
 - c) sustainable use of scarce natural resources including renewable sources of energy
 - d) protection of biodiversity
 - e) coping with population pressures
3. Capacity-building measures and know-how transfer
 - a) improvement of technical land and water management skills
 - b) promotion and utilisation of traditional and site-specific technological knowledge and practices
 - c) training, environmental education and environmental information
 - d) promotion of specific research on the causes and negative effects of desertification
 - e) advancement of applied agricultural and biotechnology research
 - f) capacity-building such as training sessions and dispatch of experts to enhance scientific and technical capacity for combating desertification, taking into consideration the special role of women
 - g) transfer and adaptation of environmentally sound technologies
 - h) use of state-of-the-art information technologies such as geographic information systems.
4. Additional measures:
 - a) call upon developed countries, in conformity with the letter and spirit of the UNCCD, to take appropriate actions aimed at relieving the current burden on developing countries, particularly through the promotion of economic reforms aimed at combining growth with human development, equity and social justice by, inter alia, agreeing on the relief of external debt, reducing interest rates and improving the overall trading environment
 - b) proposal to accompany anti-desertification measures with secured and innovative financing
 - c) clear orientation of public policies towards addressing the root causes of poverty through participative and democratic processes leading to a real and efficient empowerment of communities, especially women, at the front line of the sustainable development struggle
 - d) closer collaboration with local communities, non-governmental and community-based organisations and civil society, which carry out grass-roots aid activities and play an important role in combating desertification
 - e) avoidance of production and consumption patterns with negative impacts on land
 - f) declaration of the land that feeds us, and particularly what is known as its topsoil layer, as a common human patrimony requiring imperative, urgent, concerted and worldwide protection.

During the first four Round Tables the parliamentarians addressed very specific recommendations to themselves as can be seen in the following table.

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Table 2
MPs' self-commitments in relation to the UNCCD

MPs committed themselves to foster/promote:	1 st Rd Table Dakar 1998	2 nd Rd Table Recife 1999	3 rd Rd Table Bonn 2000	4 th Rd Table Geneva 2001
Poverty reduction / sustainable development	x	x	x	x
Decision-making, participative and democratic processes	x			x
Involvement of all stakeholders, in part. civil society, NGOs, youth and women's associations	x	x		
Introduction, strengthening and implementation of national legislation	x	x	x	
Integration of the main UNCCD provisions in national policies for sustainable development	x			
Inclusion in the overall government agendas	x			
Specific national budget lines			x	
National action programmes covering water management and applied agricultural research	x			
Action programmes based on the reforestation and rehabilitation of land	x			
Debt-for-nature swaps for land rehabilitation and reforestation	x			
Capacity / institution building or strengthening	x	x	x	
Monitoring of government action	x			
Public awareness campaigns	x	x incl. biodiversity and climate change		
Environmental education school curricula	x	x incl. science and culture	x	
An annual special parliamentary event, the "Inter-national Day to Combat Desertification" 17 June			x	
Commemorative postal stamps			x	
A follow-up mechanism by creating an open-ended High-Level Forum of Members of Parliament		x	x	
Mobilisation of financial resources	x	x	x	
Involvement of the private sector			x	x
Synergies in the implementation of the different sustainable development instruments				x
Inter regional, regional and sub regional co-operation		x		

IV. IMPACT OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ROUND TABLES

Though it is rather difficult to evaluate the impact of the four Parliamentary Round Tables, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- (a) It is of great merit that – with the support of the IPU and the UNCCD secretariat – a parliamentary dimension was added to the UNCCD process and to the Conferences of the Parties.
- (b) The Parliamentary Round Tables have become a platform for exchange of views and interaction among parliamentarians on desertification issues.³² It has been clearly recognised that due to the multiple causes of land degradation, combating desertification requires a wide range of measures (see Box 1).
- (c) Each of the COPs 2-5 took note “with appreciation” of the Declaration, adopted by the Round Tables, and decided to include it as an annex to the report of the COP. However, with respect to the official outcomes of the COPs, the Parliamentary Round Tables were not a “front-runner” in formulating specific demands related to the desertification cause. Though they were sometimes quite innovative (see for instance the Second Round Table’s emphasis on educational, scientific and cultural policies for implementing the Convention).
- (d) The IPU, in particular its Committee on Sustainable Development³³, has dealt with the outcomes of the different UNCCD Parliamentary Round Tables and considered where appropriate – the issues of land degradation, soil loss and desertification in its resolutions.³⁴ In future, the newly created IPU Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Trade and Finance is expected to cover the work and activities of the old Committee.³⁵ The Council of the IPU generally endorsed the round table outcomes, recommending that the IPU provide further technical assistance to the secretariat of the UNCCD for the holding of future parliamentary round tables, and following the findings of its Committee on Sustainable Development. However, the IPU did not endorse the idea (proposed at the second and third

³² Due to the lack of time and to problems inherent with finding out the specific impacts that parliamentary conferences, declarations or resolutions have on given policy areas, it has not been possible to say more of the extent to which the Round Tables have influenced the anti-desertification policies of countries.

³³ IPU, Reports of the Committee for Sustainable Development: CL/164/13(c)-R.1, 3 March 1999; CL/166/16(d)-R.1, 3 March 2000; CL/168/13(d)-R.1, 14 March 2001; CL/170/13(d)-R.1, 20 March 2002.

³⁴ See, for example, the parliamentary message to the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, adopted by the IPU Council at its 168th session (Havana, 7 April 2001): “Natural and environmental resources constitute the common inheritance and capital assets of the poor. It is the poor who suffer most from the degradation of land, soil, water and forestry resources which are vital to their food security, their livelihood and their very survival. Multilateral rules and standards, whether they be in trade, investment, intellectual property or the environment, should contribute to the maintenance, regeneration and enhancement of these assets, instead of their erosion.”

³⁵ The IPU has been going through an active reform process. In Santiago (108th Inter-Parliamentary Conference, April 2003), the Conference adopted all of the amendments proposed to the Union’s Statutes and Rules on the recommendation of the Council. One of the decisions was to discontinue the existing Committee on Sustainable Development. The newly created Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade should integrate the work of the old Committee on Sustainable Development which did a good job in promoting the desertification issue within the IPU and also being an interlocutor of the UNCCD secretariat. At an IPU meeting in Geneva in March 1999, MPs listened to Mr. Oscar Oramas, a senior official of the UNCCD secretariat, who indicated that the declaration of the First Round Table was a milestone in the implementation of the Convention due to the fact that the parliamentarians participating at the meeting recognised the importance of the Convention and its implementation at the national level.

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Round Tables) to establish a follow-up mechanism by creating an open-ended High-Level Forum of Members of Parliament engaged in the advancement of the Conventions objectives.

- (e) Some specific self-commitments made by the parliamentarians deserve further follow-up, such as the organisation of an annual parliamentary event (International Day to Combat Desertification third Round Table) or the calls for monitoring government action, for strengthening the participative and democratic processes, for specific budget-lines and for consistent integration of the main UNCCD provisions in national policies for sustainable development (first, third and fourth Round Tables).
- (f) Considering the high political relevance of land degradation, soil erosion and desertification issues,³⁶ there is at the national and international levels – a need for improved parliamentary participation and continuity, for greater parliamentary involvement, for capacity strengthening and for more parliamentary networking.

**V. PROPOSALS FOR A STRONGER PARLIAMENTARY INVOLVEMENT IN THE
UNCCD IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS**

The following proposals issue from the main functions and tasks of democratically elected and functioning – often bicameral – parliaments as described and analysed in the IPU's *Universal Declaration on Democracy*,³⁷ the United Nations Development Programme Human Development Report 2002, *Deepening democracy in a fragmented world*,³⁸ and the IPU's Resolution on *Parliaments' Role in Strengthening Democratic Institutions and Human Development in a Fragmented World* (2003),³⁹ as well as the scientific literature.⁴⁰

³⁶ Desertification has many impacts, that is on food security, natural resources and eco systems, migration, political stability and on sustainable human development as a whole. See U. Holtz, *The UNCCD and its Political Dimension*, Bonn, May 2003.

³⁷ The Declaration was adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Council at its 161st session (Cairo, 16 September 1997) - available at <http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/161-dem.htm>.

³⁸ Human Development Report 2002 *Deepening democracy in a fragmented world*, UNDP, New York 2002, p.17: "Democratic governance is valuable in its own right. But it can also advance human development, for three reasons. First, enjoying political freedom and participating in the decisions that shape one's life are fundamental human rights: they are part of human development in their own right. ... democracy helps protect people from economic and political catastrophes such as famines and descents into chaos. ... democratic governance can trigger a virtuous cycle of development - as political freedom empowers people to press for policies that expand social and economic opportunities, and as open debates help communities shape their priorities." And see p.55: "The most benign dictatorship imaginable would not be compatible with human development because human development has to be fully owned."

³⁹ Resolution adopted unanimously by the 108th Conference (Santiago de Chile, 11 April 2003), available at <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/108-1.htm>.

⁴⁰ See for instance, Inter-Parliamentary Union (ed.): *Democracy: Its Principles and Achievements*, Geneva 1998, in which eleven experts and scholars from different geopolitical currents present their views on the principles and achievements of democracy.

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Box 2 Key principles of democracy

In 1995 the Inter-Parliamentary Union assembled experts from various regions and disciplines to develop an international standard on democracy. Building on this work, the Universal Declaration on Democracy was adopted in 1997.

As an ideal, democracy aims to protect and promote the dignity and fundamental rights of the individual, instil social justice and foster economic and social development. Democracy is a political system that enables people to freely choose an effective, honest, transparent and accountable government.

Democracy is based on two core principles: participation and accountability.

Genuine democracy presupposes a genuine partnership between men and women in conducting the affairs of society.

Democracy is also inseparable from human rights and founded on the primacy of the law, for which judicial institutions and independent, impartial, effective oversight mechanisms are the guarantors.

The Declaration sets out the prerequisites for democratic government, emphasising the need for properly structured, well-functioning institutions.

A parliament representing all parts of society is essential. It must be endowed with institutional powers and practical means to express the will of the people by legislating and overseeing government action. A key feature of the exercise of democracy is holding free, fair, regular elections based on universal, equal, secret suffrage. The state of democracy presupposes freedom of opinion and expression.

The institutions and processes essential to any democracy must defend diversity, pluralism and the right to be different within a tolerant society.

An active civil society is also essential.

The Declaration deals with the international dimension of democracy as well, stating that democracy must also be recognised as an international principle and must be applied to the international management of issues of global interest.

Sources: Anders B. Johnsson, Secretary General of the IPU, in: *Human Development Report 2002 Deepening democracy in a fragmented world*, UNDP, New York 2002, p.55; IPU Press Release, No. 6, Cairo, 16 September 1997

While acknowledging that national parliaments represent the basis for good governance, it is recognized that parliaments take on different shapes or what emerges is a model of parliamentary governance labelled the “parliamentary hexagon”.

The parliamentary hexagon

The “parliamentary hexagon” describes the main roles six and functions of parliaments⁴¹ consisting in:

- (a) Making laws (legislative power)
- (b) Deciding on the budget (power of the purse)
- (c) Holding government accountable and exercising control of executive action (power of parliamentary oversight)
- (d) Representing democratic publics (power of representation and discourse)
- (e) Electing the executive (elective power), and
- (f) Influencing foreign policy and international relations (treaty and war power, power of mediation between the public and international organisations and institutions).

⁴¹ A very important role is played by the political opposition, which should be adequately represented in the workings of the parliament and be given the resources it needs to do an efficient job. See *Parliaments' Role in Strengthening Democratic Institutions and Human Development in a Fragmented World*. Inter-Parliamentary Union, CONF/108/4-Doc.Inf.1, 28 February 2003, p. 2.

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Parliaments are stronger or weaker in accomplishing the 6 different roles.⁴² And policy-making is a result of complicated political, social and institutional processes.⁴³

The *Universal Declaration on Democracy* rightly stipulates that a parliament must be endowed with the requisite powers and practical means to express the will of the people by legislating and overseeing government action.

The Resolution *Parliaments' Role in Strengthening Democratic Institutions and Human Development in a Fragmented World* propagates sustainable human development as an overall political objective; at the same time, it expresses concern that efforts to build strong democratic institutions in ensuring successful long-term human development encounter numerous challenges, such as poverty, corruption, globalization, lack of resources, discrimination, transnational crime, civil strife, environmental degradation and overpopulation.

In the spirit of the ideas developed by the first four UNCCD Parliamentary Round Tables, the IPU findings and the parliamentary hexagon, the following proposals aiming at a stronger parliamentary involvement the UNCCD process are submitted.⁴⁴ They take into account the fact that time is a scarce resource for many MPs and that MPs need to have the perspective of being “rewarded” for a greater engagement in new fields of activities (in the form of winning higher prestige and “power”, rising better positions in the parliament or the party, improving re-election chances, etc.).

The proposals are also directly inspired by the WSSD outcomes, including the parliamentary declaration “*Toward sustainability: implementing Agenda 21*” adopted by acclamation at the occasion of the Parliamentary Meeting organized jointly by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Parliament of South Africa, 29 and 30 August 2002 on the occasion of the World Summit on Sustainable Development.⁴⁵ In this declaration the members of parliament i. a. pledge to formally review in their respective parliaments the Plan of Implementation of the WSSD and to speedily implement through legislation, including of budgetary measures, the provisions of the Plan. The MPs recognise the unique role of parliamentarians in scrutinising, monitoring and holding national

⁴² In many countries parliaments are in the hands of powerful government machines and dominated by the executive branch. The legislature often plays a limited role in policy-making for example, with budgets discussed only at their final stage in many parliaments. Often parliaments simply lack technical capacity and the required equipment, office space and access to information. Democratic decentralisation requires more than just decentralising and devolving power. It also requires widening participation especially by people who are often marginalized, such as women, minorities and the poor and increasing the accountability of public officials at local levels.

⁴³ In theory policy-making is a problem-solving process which is rational, linear, balanced, objective and analytical. However, very often, the whole life of policy is a chaos of purposes and accidents. Practice teaches that policy implementation is an ongoing, non-linear process that must be managed. It requires consensus building, participation of key stakeholders, conflict resolution, compromise, contingency planning, resource mobilisation and adaptation. New policies often reconfigure roles, structures, and incentives, thus changing the array of costs and benefits to implementers, direct beneficiaries, and other stakeholders. As a result, policy implementation is often very difficult. Experience has shown that an inwardly focussed, ‘business as usual’ approach will fall short of achieving intended results. In Rebecca Sutton, *The Policy Process: An Overview Working Paper 118*, (Overseas Development Institute), London, August 1999.

⁴⁴ Some of them are already considered in the draft Declaration for the fifth Round Table in Havana, September 2003 - see Annex V.

⁴⁵ Available online at <http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/Jbrg02/final.pdf>.

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governments to account in respect of the implementation of international agreements and they commit to put into place:

- (a) New regulatory and administrative foundations to make the integrated approach of sustainable development permeate every act of government
- (b) National strategies for sustainable development that include a measure of decentralization of public and private institutions for appropriate local decisions to provide a coherent policy framework and measurable targets
- (c) Requirements for thorough environmental and social impact assessments;
- (d) Systems that provide access to relevant information for people and decision makers
- (e) Regulations to implement new and rigorous methods of green accounting in both public and private sectors
- (f) Democratic institutions and processes that are accountable, allow for consultation with and input from civil society, abide by the rule of law and respect fundamental human rights and human dignity.

The proposals also stem from a review of the UNCCD implementation process; The UNCCD Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC)⁴⁶ came to some conclusions relevant for a parliamentary follow-up:

- (a) Mainstreaming the fight against desertification into national development plans, key sectors or strategies has taken place in some countries, but does not appear to be a sufficient condition for securing the required national or external support, including new additional resources.
- (b) Weak institutional capacities often combined with policy inconsistencies and poor harmonization of environmental laws hamper the implementation process.
- (c) The progress made on synergies with other environmental conventions and, as appropriate, with national development strategies, is insufficient.
- (d) The review and harmonisation of relevant legislation on natural resource management, land and water rights and decentralization remains a daunting but necessary task.

A parliamentary action plan

It is recommended that parliamentarians should work towards:

- (a) The strengthening of national legislation, its harmonization with the provisions of the UNCCD and the incorporation into Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSPs), national actions plans and country programmes of anti-desertification requirements. They should seek more synergies between the three Rio conventions (climate, biodiversity, desertification) – important tools for sustainable human development and poverty eradication.
- (b) The creation of specific anti-land degradation budget lines and for coherent budget strategies that integrate foreign assistance into their own development plans;
- (c) (i) The supervision of executive actions, including oral and written questions to ministers, hearings and other practices that support scrutiny; and monitoring that anti-desertification issues are included in the overall government agendas;

⁴⁶ Report of the CRIC at its first session, held in Rome from 11 to 22 November 2002. Available at <http://www.unccd.int/cop/officialdocs/cric1/pdf/10eng.pdf>.

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- (ii) Better coordination of Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEAs), PRSPs, Country Strategy Papers (CSPs), National Action Programmes (NAPs) (supported by bilateral and multilateral development agencies and organizations) where anti-desertification is concerned;⁴⁷
- (d) (i) Providing citizens – through awareness campaigns, annual events (International Day to Combat Desertification on June 17), environmental education, the involvement of schools, academics and artists, commemorative postal stamps – with the information needed to hold governments accountable and to contribute constructively to the processes used to produce policy and legislation relating to sustainable human development and democratization,
- (ii) Ensuring an effective annual process within parliaments for reviewing progress with regard to the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development at the national level, and also for monitoring the international agenda for sustainable development,
- (iii) Fostering participation of all stakeholders, in particular civil society, NGOs, youth and women's associations, in political decision-making;
- (e) The setting up of a Parliamentary (and/or Government) Commissioner for Future Generations who should submit regular reports on the state of combating land degradation, soil loss and desertification and the progresses achieved;
- (f) (i) Paying closer attention to international issues paying in particular to development financing, debt, poverty reduction and sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, the rights of the child, and the right to education, and to routinely taking account of these dimensions in particular, when legislating. With respect to the World Trade Organization Doha Round, they should advocate the further examination of the relationship between trade, environment and development, and action to reduce, for instance, the current system of European Union (EU) agricultural export subsidies and barriers to imports from developing countries, to increase Official Development Assistance (ODA) as promised at Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development, and to realise the WSSD Plan of Implementation;
- (ii) Continued and better use of the existing Parliamentary UNCCD Round Table and of international or regional parliamentary assemblies, such as the IPU or the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States/European Union (ACP-EU) Joint Parliamentary Assembly, to promote sustainable human development and anti-desertification issues,⁴⁸
- (iii) The creation – under the auspices of the IPU and with the support of the UNCCD secretariat – of a Parliamentary Network on the UNCCD / PNoUNCCD a network of information, interaction, influence, and capacity strengthening; The network's main purpose would be to increase more sustained parliamentary involvement and efficiency

⁴⁷ Obviously there is a lack of coherence and coordination among the different plans and programmes in addition to a lack of parliamentary participation, As discussed in U. Holtz, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and Country Strategy Papers and their relationship with the Combat against Desertification - Role of Parliaments, Bonn, May 2003.

⁴⁸ As in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe vis-à-vis the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development, the Pan-African Parliament of the African Union could serve as the African Development Bank's parliamentary oversight mechanism. The Bank adopted a broad-based consultative process for the elaboration of its vision: within the Bank, it consulted with staff, the Board of Directors and Regional and Non-regional Governors; and outside the Bank, it consulted with some sixty different development agencies and organisations including non-governmental organisations, civil society, the private sector, bilateral development agencies and other multilateral finance institutions (See http://www.afdb.org/knowledge/documents/The_Banks_Vision.htm). Parliamentarians were here too, a *quantité négligeable*.

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in combating desertification, soil erosion, water shortage and land degradation; enabling parliamentarians to pool information and to ensure greater parliamentary input into international negotiations and organizations including, if necessary, parliamentary diplomacy activities.

Parliamentary Network on the UNCCD

The idea of creating international parliamentary networks specific policy matters is not new. Three examples follow:

- (a) In 2000, the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank started out as an informal network of parliamentarians interested in the work of the World Bank and development. Today the World Bank Network is a non-profit association which gathers together over 140 parliamentarians from 60 countries. Its purpose is both to increase parliamentary involvement and effectiveness in the field of international development and to encourage dialogue between MPs and the World Bank. Unfortunately, there is no direct relationship between this network and the IPU.
- (b) The IPU Conference, held in Amman in May 2000, called on governments to acknowledge that the human rights of children are frequently breached, resulting in their physical and sexual abuse, and to take practical measures to combat such abuse it proposed “the establishment of an inter-parliamentary network under the auspices of the Inter-Parliamentary Union to combat child abuse”. (There has been no follow-up so far.)
- (c) In February 2003, the President of the Council of the IPU, Chilean Senator Sergio Páez, and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Culture Organization (UNESCO) Director General, Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura, discussed the possibility of creating a parliamentary network within the IPU on matters related to UNESCO, particularly in the field of education. The proposal was approved by the IPU Council meeting in Santiago de Chile, April 2003. The network will be launched on the occasion of the next UNESCO General Conference in October 2003.

There is a fivefold need and motivation for the establishment of a Parliamentary Network on the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (PNoUNCCD) under the auspices of the IPU and with the support of the UNCCD secretariat:

- (a) The fight against desertification, land degradation, soil loss and water shortage deserves a stronger parliamentary commitment;
- (b) The parliamentary declaration on the occasion of the World Summit on Sustainable Development calls for bringing a parliamentary dimension to the United Nations, the WTO, the Bretton Woods Institutions and all such multilateral organizations engaged in implementing the outcome of the Summit (the UNCCD secretariat is engaged in fostering the Summit outcomes);
- (c) MPs have an essential role to play (see the “parliamentary hexagon”), especially in the implementation of the UNCCD and the mainstreaming anti-desertification, including through the adoption of budgets by parliaments.

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- (d) MPs need relevant and up-dated information for a stronger UNCCD commitment, noting that the UNCCD is an internationally and nationally binding convention and as such a unique tool to combat both poverty and environmental deterioration. MPs need to be empowered in the spirit of the parliamentary hexagon through influence and capacity strengthening and – primarily thanks to the new information technologies through pooling and exchanging information, through sharing experiences and examples of good practice;
- (e) The IPU is the appropriate and right “umbrella” for such a network: it is the world organization of parliaments, experienced in fostering contacts, coordination and the exchange of experience among parliaments and parliamentarians of all countries and in introducing parliamentary dimensions to international processes (e.g. Conference on Security and Cooperation (CSCM) or parliamentary round tables.

The purpose of the PNoUNCCD should be to:

- (a) Provide the members of the network with a platform for knowledge sharing, interaction and coordinated proactive measures;
- (b) Help increase parliamentary involvement in, influence on, democratic control over and monitoring of the national and international levels in anti-desertification (and sustainable human development) issues;⁴⁹
- (c) Facilitate awareness-raising, early debate and the exchange of information, experience and good practices, that is by its own website;⁵⁰
- (d) Support resource mobilization;
- (e) Encourage coalition-building and partnerships between parliamentarians and policy makers, the academic community, the business sector and non-governmental organizations;
- (f) Promote forms of international, regional and subregional cooperation, favourable to improving relations between the relevant intergovernmental organisations, including, if necessary, parliamentary diplomacy activities.

The Parliamentary Round Tables will also benefit from the PNoUNCCD.

The IPU, in particular its Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Trade and Finance secretariat, and the UNCCD secretariat should be the primary interlocutors of the PNoUNCCD. Other interlocutors would be the other Multilateral Environmental Agreement (MEA) secretariats, and relevant organizations such as the World Bank, UNDP, FAO, IFAD, the African Union or the EU. Thematic or regional subgroups of the network could be created.

⁴⁹ MPs should participate in and/or try to influence other relevant international conferences, which may have an impact on the fight against soil erosion, land degradation and desertification (such as the Conference on Renewable Energies, Bonn, June 2004).

⁵⁰ At the third Round Table, MPs requested the Conventions secretariat to post and update information on the Round Table discussions on the UNCCD website. The IPU, UNCCD and MPs should be the main content providers for the PNoUNCCD website. The web is international, immediate and interactive; it offers connectivity, content and capability. A digital divide among parliamentarians should be avoided at all costs.

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The PNoUNCCD should be directed by a parliamentary steering committee composed by at least one MP from the different groups recognised by the IPU: The African, Arab, Asia-Pacific, Eurasia, Latin American and the Twelve Plus Groups. In addition, at least one MP of the dozen titular or substitute bureau members of the IPU's Committee on Sustainable Development, Trade and Finance should be an ex officio member of the steering committee, appointed by the IPU. Focal points should be established in interested parliaments.

Annex I

**PROCESS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNCCD - DECLARATION BY THE
ROUND TABLE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS ORGANIZED BY THE CONVENTION
SECRETARIAT AND SPONSORED BY THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION**
(Dakar, 7 December 1998)

I. We, the Parliamentarians invited to meet in Dakar, Senegal, on 7 December 1998 by the Convention secretariat, the National Assembly of Senegal and the Inter-Parliamentary Union in the context of the second session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those countries experiencing serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, declare that:

1. We are deeply alarmed by the impact of desertification which affects 3,600 million hectares, representing 70 per cent of the potential productive land in arid zones. The rapidity of this progression means that there is a loss of 6 million hectares annually. We are conscious of the gravity of the situation in different regions of the world as in Africa, a continent where deserts or arid zones constitute two-thirds of the total land area and 73 per cent of the arid land is already seriously or moderately degraded; in Asia where around 1,400 million hectares are affected by desertification, which corresponds to 71 per cent of the arid land of the continent which is moderately or severely degraded; in Latin America, where nearly three quarters of the arid land is moderately or severely degraded and the Mediterranean, where almost two-thirds of the arid land is severely degraded; the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, where 40 per cent to 80 per cent of the arid land is severely degraded;

2. It is intolerable that at the beginning of the twenty-first century near 1 billion men, women and children, are permanently threatened by desertification; that hundreds of millions of people suffer from a chronic shortage of basic necessities such as water; and that millions of "environmental refugees" are forced to abandon their native land to seek relief elsewhere;

3. We share fully the founding premise of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, according to which sustainable development cannot be attained unless:

- (i) it is oriented towards people in protecting the interests of the affected populations and eradicates poverty;
- (ii) it involves these populations fully in the decision-making process, in measures for the protection of the environment and in the struggle against desertification;
- (iii) it includes the dimension of the fight against poverty.

4. We believe that desertification, poverty, famine, social and political disturbances, wars, migration and the displacement of populations, which have led many times to new and most serious degradation of the natural environment, are all interconnected;

5. We take note of the serious budgetary constraints of the poorest affected countries, which still have to devote a considerable proportion of their scant financial resources to debt repayment and servicing.

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II. Affirming our total commitment, as Parliamentarians, to contribute fully to the implementation of the Convention, in countries that are Parties to the Convention.

6. We support where necessary the adoption or the strengthening of legislation concerning the fight against desertification and the preservation of the ecosystems in all the affected countries,

7. We subscribe to the promotion of policies and the strengthening of appropriate institutional frameworks for the favourable development of co-operation among the countries affected by desertification and their partners in development;

8. We support the strengthening of social, education, health and policies through public awareness campaigns about the negative effects of desertification as well as the participation of youth and women in the development programmes;

9. We subscribe to the integration of the main provisions of the Convention in national policies for sustainable development;

10. We subscribe to the initiative that the year 2000 be the starting point of the decade to combat desertification;

11. We support fully the initiatives of agencies, donor countries and civil society to mobilise financial assistance for the promotion of sustainable development in poorest countries with fragile ecosystems, through the Convention's Global Mechanism.

III. We undertake to promote in our respective Parliaments:

12. The follow-up of implementation of the Convention, making full use of the mechanisms available in our Parliaments to monitor government action and thus ensure that the Convention is fully implemented;

13. The formulation of national legislation and its harmonisation with the provisions of the Convention;

14. The inclusion of the combat against desertification in the overall agendas of our national governments so as to make the combat a priority matter for our countries as for our regional and sub-regional organisations;

15. The formulation of national action programmes covering water management and applied agricultural research in the poorest countries affected by desertification and others as necessary, and their financing in accordance with the provisions of the Convention;

16. The adoption of practical measures to include environmental education, in particular the fight against desertification, in school curricula.

IV. We are deeply convinced of the need to undertake far-reaching action with the main priorities:

17. To promote forms of regional and sub-regional co-operation, favourable to improving relations between our relevant intergovernmental organisations;

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18. To set up, at the local level, action programmes based on the reforestation and rehabilitation of land which involves all stakeholders in the field, in particular the education system and representatives of civil society, especially youth and women's associations;

19. To define action programmes involving international organisations, including United Nations agencies, donors, national institutions, elected representatives, NGOs, and the local population, in particular resource users, both men and women, to promote the objectives of the Convention;

20. As appropriate in the case of poorest affected countries to expand debt-for-nature swaps for land rehabilitation and reforestation.

V. We Parliamentarians address an urgent appeal:

21. To all relevant participants in civil society, such as financial institutions, personalities in the fields of finance, commerce, sport, the media and the arts, to support the mobilisation of financial resources to support the fight against desertification which is under way in the developing countries most seriously affected by desertification and drought;

22. To academic institutions, the scientific community and research centres for their support in the various tasks of implementing the Convention in affected countries with particular regard to the needs of developing countries;

23. To the Inter-Parliamentary Union to give the widest publicity possible to this Declaration and, notably that it be transmitted to all national parliaments for their attention;

24. To the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification to continue the actions taken up to this time to support the countries affected by desertification, and to take all necessary measures to the present declaration universally known;

25. To the secretariats of the UNCCD and the Inter-Parliamentary Union to take follow-up action on the present meeting and organise similar meetings in conjunction with future conferences of the Parties.

Annex II

**DECLARATION BY MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT - SECOND ROUND TABLE OF
MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT - THE ROLE OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT IN
DESIGNING EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL POLICIES FOR
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNCCD**

(Recife, 22-23 November 1999)

I. We, members of parliament meeting in Recife, Brazil, from 22 to 23 November 1999 for the second Round Table at the invitation of the Convention secretariat and the National Congress of Brazil, with the full support of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in the context of the third session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa, declare that:

1. We are deeply alarmed by the impact of land degradation and desertification processes that are occurring, and accelerating, over much of the 30 percent of the Earth's surface, which is designated by the UN as dry or semi-arid. We are conscious that over 70 per cent of this area is used for agriculture or pastoral activities and that approximately 15 per cent of the world's population and 25 per cent of the total land area of the Earth is directly affected by land degradation and desertification processes. We are conscious of the gravity of the situation in different regions of the world as in Africa, a continent where deserts or arid zones constitute two-thirds of the total land area and 73 per cent of the arid land is already seriously or moderately degraded; in Asia where approximately 71 per cent of the Continent's arid lands are severely degraded; in Latin America, where nearly three-quarters of the arid land is moderately or severely degraded; the Mediterranean, where almost two-thirds of the arid land is severely degraded, and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, where 40 to 80 per cent of the arid land is severely degraded;

2. It is a cause for great concern that losses of productivity implied by desertification processes severely undermine sustainable economic growth, limit food security and exacerbate susceptibility to famine, often accompanied by large-scale movements of displaced people. The failure of marginally productive land to cope with population pressures, together with increasingly variable climate, including recurrent drought, may already have displaced as many as 25 million people worldwide from their land and constituted a source of inter-communal conflict in many parts of the world;

3. We share fully the founding premise of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, according to which sustainable development cannot be attained unless:

- (i) it is clearly oriented towards people, addresses the interests of affected populations and has as its ultimate objective the alleviation of poverty;
- (ii) it fully involves affected populations and local communities in the decision-making process, as well as in the implementation of measures to protect the environment, improve land and water resources management and to overcome the main causes of land degradation and desertification;

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4. We reaffirm our belief that desertification, poverty, famine, social and political disturbances, wars, migration and the displacement of populations, which have on many occasions led to further serious degradation of the natural environment, are in many cases interconnected;

5. We take note with concern that the consequences of land degradation and desertification pressures fall hardest on developing countries and that remediation programs compete for scant financial resources, much of which is still required for debt repayment and servicing. We urge the international community to seriously consider the ordeal and alienation of heavily indebted least developed countries and urge it to implement appropriate relief measures to be undertaken with the help of the Global Mechanism, particularly in those countries seriously affected by drought and desertification.

II. In affirming our commitment, as members of parliament, to contribute fully to the implementation of the Convention, we congratulate those countries which have ratified the Convention and urge those that have not yet ratified it to do so as soon as possible and join the initiative to make the year 2000 the starting point of the decade to combat desertification. Moreover:

6. We support the wide and active participation of all Parliaments in ratifying countries, in the implementation of the Convention including, where necessary, the introduction, strengthening and implementation of legislation relating to the fight against desertification and the preservation of ecosystems in countries affected;

7. We attach highest importance to the strengthening of educational, scientific and cultural policies through effective public awareness campaigns about the causes and negative effects of desertification, as well as the active participation of civil society, local communities, youth and women in efforts to identify country or region-specific solutions and strategies; We also recognised the need to ensure the raising of awareness on the protection of biodiversity and causes of climate change;

8. We support fully the initiatives of agencies, donor countries and civil society to mobilise financial assistance, through the Convention's Global Mechanism, for the implementation of sustainable development strategies in poor countries with fragile ecosystems.

III. In highlighting the fundamental role that education, science and culture play in the challenge to achieve sustainable development, we members of parliament agree:

9. To initiate with this second Round Table a concerted effort to promote concrete action-oriented measures in the area of education, applied research and capacity building to combat desertification;

10. That such measures could include, for example: awareness raising on production and consumption patterns and their impact on land, water and river basin management, improvement of technical land and water management skills, sustainable use of scarce natural resources including the use of renewable sources of energy, promotion of specific research on the causes and negative effects of desertification, transfer and adaptation of environmentally sound technologies for better land and natural resource management, the effective use of modern and safe bio-technologies to

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disseminate drought-resistant tree species, the use of state-of-the-art information technologies such as geographic information systems, the rational and integrated management of river basins, and the protection, promotion and utilisation of traditional and site-specific technological knowledge and practice

IV. We agree to establish an effective follow-up mechanism by creating an open-ended High-Level Forum of Members of Parliament engaged in the advancement of the Convention objectives and for which we seek the sponsorship of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

The High-Level Forum of Members of Parliament:

11. Will meet concurrently with each session of the Conference of the Parties to share information on national initiatives and monitor implementation of Round Table decisions in parliaments of countries that are Parties to the Convention;

12. If necessary, undertakes to work for effective national legislation with a view of facilitating the implementation and harmonisation of provisions of the Convention;

13. Undertakes to submit to the executive branches a proposal for the inclusion, where necessary, in school curricula of disciplines focussing on the protection of the environment and natural resources, particularly land and water resources, so as to make combating erosion and desertification a priority for our countries, as well as for our regional and sub-regional organisations;

14. Undertakes to support the formulation by our respective governments of national action plans or equivalent strategies to combat land degradation, improve water and river basin management and advance applied agricultural and biotechnology research in countries affected by desertification;

15. Underlines the importance of accompanying these national action plans with secured and innovative financing, where financing programs are not in existence, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention;

16. Decides to explore ways of enhancing synergies of these national action plans with other national development priorities such as education and science advancement strategies. As a first step, we recommend that an awareness day on the global environmental problem of erosion and desertification be organised or marked symbolically, possibly on an annual basis;

17. Decides to enhance co-ordination in the implementation of regional action programmes, in particular with respect to the integrated management of river basins, whether these are located within countries or shared by more than one country, and keeping fully into account relevant physical, biological and socio-economic aspects;

18. Requests the Convention secretariat to compile and synthesise a brief progress report with relevant information regarding Round Table decisions for its attention at the next meeting.

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V. We are deeply convinced that Parliaments can play an essential role in the global effort to fight causes of desertification by encouraging far-reaching action geared towards:

19. Promoting inter-regional, regional and sub-regional co-operation and the improvement of relations between our relevant intergovernmental, non-governmental and community-based organisations;

20. Setting-up or continuing, at the local level, measures for sustainable forest management and effective reforestation programmes which involve all stakeholders, in particular civil society representatives, youth and women's associations, in the rehabilitation of degraded land;

21. Widely disseminating relevant information focussing on the linkages between poverty, lack of access to education, technical and scientific knowledge and land degradation and desertification, which tend to reduce development potential of countries;

22. Adopting or maintaining multi-stakeholder action programmes, including between neighbouring countries experiencing drought and desertification, and involving international organisations, donor agencies, national institutions, elected representatives, NGOs and the local population directly affected;

23. Incorporating traditional site-specific technical and cultural knowledge and know-how in policy making.

VI. We Members of Parliament reiterate our urgent appeal:

24. To the international community to address desertification not only as an environmental and/or ecological problem, but also as a serious development problem with severe long-term economic, social, political and environmental consequences, if not mitigated in time;

25. To the developed Parties to the Convention to promote capacity building activities in affected countries, which may include the funding of public awareness, education and research programmes, as well as the dissemination of "best practices" in the field of land, forest management, water and river basin management;

26. To all relevant participants in civil society, such as financial institutions, experts in the fields of finance, commerce, sports, the media and the arts, to support the mobilisation of financial resources for the fight against desertification and land degradation, in particular in those developing countries most seriously affected by desertification, erosion and drought;

27. To academic institutions, the scientific community and research centres for their support in the various tasks of implementing the Convention in countries affected with particular regard to the needs of developing countries;

28. To the Inter-Parliamentary Union to give the widest possible publicity to this Declaration and, notably that it be transmitted to all national parliaments for their attention and engagement;

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VII. In closing, we further request:

29. The secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, in co-operation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, to provide technical support to the High-Level Forum of Members of Parliament in its role of monitoring action carried out by governments, and to mobilise additional resources for the servicing of the High-Level Forum;

30. The Inter-Parliamentary Union to lend its full support to the High-Level Forum of Members of Parliament and to assist in the co-ordination of its work;

31. The secretariats of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification to continue their co-operation and to submit a proposal for the dissemination of information on progress in fighting desertification by the next session of the Conference of the Parties;

32. Both secretariats to organise another round table of the High Level Forum of Members of Parliament in conjunction with that session;

33. The secretariats of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the Inter-Parliamentary Union to take follow-up action on the present Round Table decisions and develop strategies in order to achieve universal awareness of the declarations and progress reports of the High-Level Forum of Members of Parliament.

Annex III

**DECLARATION BY MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AT THE THIRD ROUND TABLE OF
MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT - THE SUPPORT OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT FOR
THE STRENGTHENING OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNCCD, THE
IDENTIFICATION OF DOMESTIC REVENUE-NEUTRAL FUNDING SOURCES AND
THE ENHANCEMENT OF TECHNICAL AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO THE
COUNTRIES MOST AFFECTED BY DESERTIFICATION**
(Bonn, 12-13 December 2000)

I. We, the members of parliament meeting at Bonn, Germany, from 12 to 13 December 2000, for the third Round Table at the invitation of the Convention secretariat and the German Federal Bundestag, with the full support of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in the context of the fourth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa,

reiterate the declaration we adopted at Dakar, Senegal, and at Recife, Brazil, on our role as members of parliaments in the implementation of the Convention, and being greatly concerned with the lack of progress in combating of desertification worldwide,

we declare that:

1. We are conscious that approximately 15 per cent of the world's population and 25 per cent of the total land area of the Earth are directly affected by land degradation and desertification processes. We share fully the founding premise of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, according to which sustainable development cannot be attained unless: (a) it is clearly oriented towards people, addresses the interests of affected populations and has as one of its main objectives the alleviation of poverty; (b) it fully involves affected populations and local communities in the decision-making process as well as in the implementation of measures to protect the environment, to improve the management of land and water resources and to overcome the main causes of land degradation and desertification;

2. We are greatly concerned that losses of productivity implied by desertification processes severely undermine sustainable economic growth, threaten food security and exacerbate susceptibility to famine, which are often accompanied by large-scale movements of displaced people. The failure of marginally productive land to cope with population pressures, together with increasingly variable climates, including recurrent drought, may already have displaced as many as 25 million people worldwide from their land and constituted a source of inter-communal conflict in many parts of the world. Additionally, we are equally concerned that women and children, the socially and economically weak, tend to be hit hardest by the serious consequences of desertification;

3. We are deeply concerned with the gravity of the situation in different regions of the world, such as in Africa, a continent where deserts or arid zones constitute two thirds of the total land area and where 73 per cent of the arid land is already seriously or moderately degraded; in Asia where approximately 71 per cent of the Continent's arid lands are severely degraded; in Latin America and the Caribbean, where nearly three quarters of the arid land, representing almost one fourth of the region, is moderately or severely degraded; the Mediterranean, where almost two thirds of the arid land

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is severely degraded, and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, where from 40 to 80 per cent of the arid land is severely degraded.

II. Conscious of the economic losses that result from decreasing the productive capacity of land resources and convinced that preventing further land degradation and desertification is more cost effective than remedying its environmental, social and economic consequences, we as members of parliament acknowledge that such consequences fall hardest on developing countries, that remediation programmes compete for scant financial resources and that, at the same time, these countries in fulfilling their international agreements have to divert considerable resources for debt repayment and servicing. We, therefore:

1. Urge the international community to seriously consider the ordeal and marginalization of heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) and urge it to implement appropriate relief measures, particularly in those countries seriously affected by drought and desertification;
2. Reaffirm the importance of ensuring access to appropriate financial resources, including new and additional ones, for affected developing countries in order to allow them to fully deliver the obligation contracted under the UNCCD;
3. Welcome in this regard the decision taken by the Council of the Global Environmental facility (GEF) during its meeting held in Washington D.C. from 1 to 3 November 2000, by which it requested the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the GEF to explore the best options to strengthen the support of the GEF to affected developing countries, particularly in Africa, in their process of implementation of UNCCD
4. Urge the international community, and particularly the executive branches of Parties to take all necessary measures for the establishment of a new window within the GEF for the specific purpose of financing the incremental costs of the UNCCD implementation;
5. Call for a concerted effort by bodies of the UN System, regional development banks, non-governmental organizations and the private sector to enhance desertification monitoring systems as a support for sustainable agricultural policies, better water resource and forest management, land use planning, as well as urban planning;
6. Invite executive branches of government in developing countries to consider the formulation of revenue-neutral national policies to counter further land degradation and desertification. These policies should be justified on the basis of avoidance of future costs resulting from biodiversity loss, adverse effects of climate change, further encroachment of deserts into arable land areas, increased displacement of people and refugee flows, and amplified potential for conflicts within poor countries and between neighbouring countries;
7. Urge international organisations and developed countries to increase assistance to developing countries in the implementation of their own domestic policies in combating desertification. These policies should fully integrate the adverse consequences of land degradation and desertification into economic, social, agricultural and land planning; and

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8. Fully support all initiatives of agencies, donor countries and civil society to mobilise new and additional financial resources to implement the Convention to Combat Desertification as a concrete tool for ensuring the promotion of sustainable development in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid ecosystems.

III. In affirming our commitment, as members of parliaments, to contribute fully to the implementation of the Convention, we agree to initiate or continue serious efforts in the national parliaments of developed countries to strengthen technical and financial assistance to combat desertification in the most affected and poorest countries, attaching central importance to support for their own self-help efforts. We also commit ourselves:

- (a) To convene an annual special event, the “International Day to Combat Desertification”, in our parliaments on 17 June to raise awareness on the implementation of the Convention and to support such initiatives as commemorative postal stamps, among others;
- (b) To strengthen national initiatives to enhance the fight against desertification;
- (c) To advocate increased financial and technical support from national budgets to combat desertification and land degradation;
- (d) To submit, where necessary, to the executive branches of governments a proposal for the inclusion in school curricula of disciplines focusing on the protection of the environment and of natural resources, particularly land and water resources, so as to make combating erosion and desertification a priority for our countries, as well as for our regional and subregional organisations;

IV. We note those countries that have ratified the Convention and urge those that have not yet ratified it to do so as soon as possible as a concrete step towards a concerted effort to combat desertification.

- (a) Moreover, we support the active participation of all parliaments in the implementation of the Convention including, where necessary, the introduction, strengthening and implementation of legislation relating to the fight against desertification and the protection and preservation of ecosystems in countries affected;
- (b) In doing so, we urge Parliaments and the international community to address desertification not only as a serious environmental and/or ecological problem, but also as a serious hindrance to development with severe long-term global economic, social and political consequences.

V. In highlighting the fundamental role that technical assistance, enhanced environmental monitoring and capacity building play in the challenge to achieve sustainable development, we members of parliament urge donor agencies and countries to consider strengthening their support for the following measures, building upon self-help efforts to be made by developing countries:

- (a) awareness raising on production and consumption patterns and their impact on the land;

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- (b) water and river basin management;
- (c) improvement of technical land and water management skills;
- (d) sustainable use of scarce natural resources including renewable sources of energy;
- (e) promotion of specific research on the causes and negative effects of desertification;
- (f) transfer and adaptation of environmentally sound technologies for better land and natural resource management, and the effective use of modern and safe bio-technologies to disseminate drought-resistant species;
- (g) use of state-of-the-art information technologies such as geographic information systems, the rational and integrated management of river basins, and the protection, promotion and utilization of traditional and site-specific technological knowledge and practices;
- (h) reforestation and forest conservation to combat desertification caused by drought as well as by deforestation due to population increase, overgrazing, illegal and excessive logging, bush and forest fires, etc;
- (i) agricultural development, for example, by establishing sustainable irrigation facilities to secure stable water supplies;
- (j) capacity building such as training sessions and despatch of experts to enhance the scientific and technical capacity, taking into consideration the special role of women, for combating desertification;
- (k) promotion of deeper dialogue with and the active participation of the local community so that aid programmes can be tailored to local conditions;
- (l) closer collaboration with non-governmental and community-based organisations and the civil society, which carry out grassroots aid activities and play an important role in combating desertification.

VI. We commit to establish an effective follow-up mechanism for the purpose of overseeing and ensuring the systematic monitoring of the implementation of the decisions we have taken and decide:

- (a) To underline the importance of operationalizing a viable inter-sessional mechanism through an open-ended high-level forum of members of parliaments composed of a chairperson, a rapporteur and five vice-chairpersons, with at least one coming from each of the following regional groups: Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe, Eastern Europe and North America.
- (b) To request, in this regard, the Convention secretariat, in consultation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union to prepare a concrete proposal for the functioning of the high-level forum and to circulate it among members of parliament involved in previous round tables,

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for response not later than 31 May 2001, with a view of approving it before the fifth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention.

- (c) To solicit the Convention secretariat to post and update information on round table discussions on the UNCCD website;
- (d) To request all presiding officers to take steps to publicise the present declaration by placing it on the agenda of their national parliaments or by bringing it to the attention of all members of their parliament in some other appropriate way.

VII. We members of parliament reiterate our urgent appeal:

- (a) To all participants in civil society, such as financial institutions, experts in the fields of finance, industry, commerce, sports, the media and the arts, to support the mobilisation of financial resources for the fight against desertification, in particular in those developing countries most seriously affected by desertification, erosion and drought;
- (b) To academic institutions, the scientific community and research centres for their support in the various tasks of implementing the Convention in the affected countries with particular regard to the needs of developing countries;
- (c) To the Inter-Parliamentary Union to give the widest possible publicity to this Declaration and, particularly, to ensure that it be transmitted to all national parliaments for their attention and implementation.

VIII. Finally, we request the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, with the assistance of the Inter-Parliamentary Union:

- (a) to provide technical support to the high-level forum of members of parliament in its role of monitoring action carried out by governments, and to mobilise additional resources for the servicing of the high-level forum;
- (b) to organise the next round table of members of parliaments in conjunction with the fifth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention;
- (c) to take follow-up action on the decisions of the present round table and to develop strategies in order to achieve universal awareness of the declarations and progress reports of the high-level forum of members of parliament.

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Annex IV

**DECLARATION BY MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AT THE FOURTH ROUND TABLE
OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT - THE ROLE OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT IN
ADDRESSING THE INTERLINKAGES BETWEEN POVERTY AND SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT, PARTICULARLY DESERTIFICATION, WITHIN THE
FRAMEWORK OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNCCD**
(Geneva, 4-5 October 2001)

I. We, members of parliament, meeting in Geneva on 4 and 5 October 2001 for the fourth Round Table at the invitation of the Convention secretariat, with the full support of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the assistance of the Government of Switzerland, in the sidelines of the fifth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa,

Deeply concerned by the persistent trends of desertification worldwide, particularly in the fragile ecosystems of developing countries' economies,

Aware of the enormous losses generated by this large-scale phenomenon and its direct consequences for global equilibrium, particularly insofar as it relates to food production and availability, disruption of traditional migration flows, and human security,

Conscious of the global threat that lies in the continuous degradation of the land that sustains us,

Mindful of the direct causality links existing between land degradation and poverty which generate vicious circles of land over-exploitation by increasingly deprived communities,

Bearing in mind the increasing deprivation suffered by poor people in terms of social, economic, environmental and cultural services and opportunities,

Recalling the warning of the Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme regarding the risk of producing a "world gargantuan in its excess, grotesque in its human and economic inequalities" if the imbalance in economic growth continues,

Conscious that not all the economic growth is beneficial when it embraces policies leading to development that is jobless (creates unemployment), ruthless (benefits on the rich to the exclusion of the poor), voiceless (suppresses democratic expression), rootless (destroys links to community and culture) and futureless (destroys the planetary support system),

Declare that:

1. We are deeply alarmed by the increasing environmental degradation, particularly desertification, that has now reached such magnitude that it threatens the very basis of life on Earth.

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2. We are greatly concerned by the continuous losses in productivity of the first sector, which still constitutes the main source of revenue for the economies of the majority of developing countries.

3. We are seriously worried by clear and sustained data indicating that desertification processes severely undermine sustainable economic growth, limit food security and exacerbate susceptibility to famine, often accompanied by large-scale movements of displaced people and by armed conflicts.

4. We are conscious of the fact that the established trends in terms of natural resources exploitation as well as the current patterns of consumption have by far exceeded the earth's carrying capacities.

5. We are convinced that addressing the issue of poverty eradication, particularly widespread environment-induced poverty and its tragic consequences in terms of macro-social disruptions, must be conceived as a total priority of integrated international policy schemes towards the promotion of sustainable development.

6. We are persuaded of the necessity to declare the land that feeds us, and particularly what is known as its topsoil layer, as a common human patrimony requiring imperative, urgent, concerted and worldwide protection.

7. We firmly believe that public policies should be clearly oriented towards addressing the root causes of poverty through participative and democratic processes leading to a real and efficient empowerment of communities, especially women, at the front line of the sustainable development struggle.

8. We underline our conviction that growth can not constitute an objective per se and should therefore be accompanied by social regulatory mechanisms which ensure an equitable redistribution of wealth amongst all, which address the issue of land tenure and which guarantee access to education in order to empower poor people and allow them to realise their potential, and in order to reduce their vulnerability to exogenous pressures.

9. We recognize that prevailing macro-economic policies have great impacts on the processes of impoverishment, and we call therefore upon developed countries, in conformity with the letter and spirit of the Convention, to take appropriate actions aimed at relieving the current burden of developing countries, particularly through the promotion of economic reforms aimed at combining growth with human development, equity and social justice by, inter alia:

- Agreeing on the relief of external debt,
- Reducing interest rates,
- Improving the overall trading environment.

II. In affirming our commitment, as members of parliament, to contribute fully to the implementation of the Convention, we note with appreciation that the international community in its wisdom has decided to address the urgent issue of UNCCD funding, particularly by defining ways and means of identifying reliable and centralized multilateral financial mechanisms in order to

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ensure that affected developing country Parties to the Convention dispose of the required financial predictability essential to their economic planning and policy formulation.

In this regard:

10. We fully support the decision of the last Governing Council of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) held in Washington D.C. in May 2001, which requested the Chief Executive Officer “to explore the best options for enhancing the support of the GEF in assisting affected countries, especially those in Africa, to implement the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, taking into account the third replenishment of the GEF”.

11. We further agree with the GEF Governing Council that addressing the issue of land degradation is an integral part of the pursuit of sustainable development, poverty alleviation and synergism amongst the global environmental conventions. We consequently praise the GEF Council for agreeing that the designation of land degradation (desertification and deforestation) as a GEF focal area should be pursued, as a means for enhancing GEF support for the successful implementation of the UNCCD.

12. We strongly request the country Parties to the Convention to designate the GEF as the operational financial mechanism of the UNCCD, in order to provide it with the predictable financial resources which will enable it to achieve its objectives in a timely and efficient manner.

13. Accordingly, we further request the GEF, at its next Assembly meeting in Beijing, China, in 2002, to make desertification a fully fledged GEF focal area along with biodiversity, climate change, the protection of the ozone layer and international waters.

14. We firmly believe that all major environmental issues are intrinsically linked and require a concerted international effort to address them synergistically. Particular emphasis should be placed on building up a culture of synergism in the implementation of the different legally binding sustainable development instruments at the field level.

15. We fully support all initiatives which aim at encouraging sustainable development promotion in order to ensure the best use of financial and human resources and the effective use of available expertise and comparative advantages, including traditional knowledge, in both developed and developing countries as well as the public and private sectors.

16. We request all presiding officers to take steps to publicise the present declaration by placing it on the agenda of their national parliaments or by bringing it to the attention of all members of their parliament in some other appropriate way.

III. Finally, we request the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, with the assistance of the Inter-Parliamentary Union:

17. To take all necessary measures to bring the present declaration to the attention of the world leaders at the forthcoming meeting of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in September 2002.

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18. To organize the next Round Table of members of parliament in conjunction with the sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention;
19. To take follow-up action on the decisions of the present round table and to develop strategies in order to achieve universal awareness of the declarations and progress reports of the parliamentary round table process.

Annex V

**DRAFT DECLARATION - FIFTH ROUND TABLE OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT IN
PARALLEL TO THE SIXTH CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO UNCCD - THE
ROLE OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT IN PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE HUMAN
DEVELOPMENT AT NATIONAL LEVEL IN THE CONTEXT OF A SUCCESSFUL
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNCCD (as at 26 May 2003)
(Havana, 3-4 September 2003)**

I. We, members of parliament, meeting in Havana on 3 and 4 September 2003 for the fifth Round Table at the invitation of the Convention secretariat, with the full support of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the assistance of the Government of Cuba, alongside the sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa,

Reaffirming our commitment to sustainable human development as a universal concept which incorporates the interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars of sustainable development – economic development, social development and environmental protection – at local, national, regional and global levels while remaining committed to the indivisibility of human dignity for all and to democratic systems as well as to democratic global governance with more effective and accountable international and multilateral institutions,

Deeply concerned by the persistent trends of environmental degradation and increase in poverty, particularly in the fragile ecosystems and drylands of developing countries,

Aware of the enormous losses of topsoil and biodiversity, due to the intensification of desertification, and the effects of climate change and their direct consequences for global equilibrium, particularly in so far as they relate to food production and availability, to disruption of traditional migration flows, and to human security,

Conscious of the global threat that lies in the continuous degradation of the land that sustains us,

Mindful of the direct causality links existing between land degradation and poverty, which generate vicious circles of land over-exploitation by increasingly deprived communities,

Bearing in mind the increasing deprivation suffered by poor people in terms of social, economic, environmental and cultural services and opportunities,

Recalling the United Nations Millennium Development Goals,⁵¹ the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD)⁵² and the Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development⁵³ which defined for the world a complete vision for the future of humanity,

⁵¹ 6-8 September 2000, New York.

⁵² Adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 26 August to 4 September 2002.

⁵³ International Conference on Financing for Development, Monterrey, Mexico, 18-22 March 2002.

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Recognizing that poverty reduction, changes in consumption and production patterns, and protection of natural resources are essential for sustainable development,

Conscious that the increasing gap between the rich and the poor constitutes a major threat to global security,

Declare that:

1. We are deeply alarmed by the increasing environmental degradation, particularly desertification, which has now reached such a magnitude that it threatens the very basis of life on Earth, and are determined to correct this dangerous course, it is therefore more than ever incumbent on us, parliamentarians and representatives of our peoples, to work together towards the common objective of sustainability - social, economic, environmental and political.
2. We are greatly concerned by the continuous losses in agricultural productivity; agriculture still constitutes the main source of revenue for the economies of the majority of developing countries.
3. We are, further, seriously worried by substantiated data indicating that desertification processes severely undermine sustainable economic growth, limit food security and exacerbate susceptibility to famine, often accompanied by large-scale movements of displaced people and by armed conflicts.
4. We are conscious of the fact that the established trends in terms of natural resources exploitation, as well as the current patterns of consumption, have by far exceeded the earth's carrying capacities.
5. We are convinced that addressing poverty eradication, particularly widespread environment-induced poverty and its tragic consequences in terms of macro-social disruptions, must be conceived as a total priority of integrated international policy schemes towards the promotion of sustainable human development.
6. We are persuaded of the necessity to declare the land that feeds us, and particularly what is known as its topsoil layer, as a common human heritage requiring imperative, urgent, concerted and worldwide protection.
7. We firmly believe that public policies should be clearly oriented towards addressing the root causes of poverty through participative and democratic processes leading to a real and efficient empowerment of communities, especially women, at the front line of the sustainable development struggle.
8. We underline our conviction that growth can not constitute an objective per se and should therefore be accompanied by social regulatory mechanisms which ensure an equitable redistribution of wealth amongst all, which address the issue of land tenure and which guarantee access to education in order to empower poor people and allow them to realize their potential, and in order to reduce their vulnerability to exodus pressures.

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9. We acknowledge the encouraging signs of progress contained in 151 national reports which were submitted to the UNCCD for review in Rome, Italy, from 11-22 November 2002; however, we deplore the fact that too often national action programmes (NAPs) and country programmes supported by the donor community do not take anti-desertification needs sufficiently into account.

10. We recognize that prevailing macro-economic policies may have great impacts on the process of impoverishment, and we call therefore upon developed countries, in conformity with the letter and spirit of the Convention, to take appropriate actions aimed at relieving the current burden of developing countries, particularly through the promotion of economic reforms aimed at combining growth with human development, equity and social justice by, inter alia:

- Agreeing on the relief of external debt
- Reducing interest rates
- Improving the overall trading environment.

II. In affirming our commitment, as members of parliament, to support sustainable human development, we note with appreciation the outcomes of the WSSD which aim to strengthen the implementation of the Convention in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa, to address causes of desertification and land degradation in order to maintain and restore land, and to address poverty resulting from land degradation. We call upon all parties involved to make every effort to ensure that the Summit declarations of intent are followed up with definite actions.

In this regard:

11. We fully support the call of the WSSD to the Second Assembly of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to designate land degradation (deforestation and desertification) as a focal area of the GEF as a means of GEF support for the successful implementation of the Convention and, consequently, to consider making the GEF a financial mechanism of the Convention. We consequently praise the decision of the GEF Assembly, in Beijing, China, in 2002 for endorsing this demand by making land degradation (deforestation) a fully-fledged GEF focal area along with biodiversity, climate change, the protection of the ozone layer and international waters.

12. We strongly request the country Parties to the Convention to designate the GEF as an operational financial mechanism of the UNCCD, in order to provide it with substantial and predictable financial resources, which will enable it to achieve its objectives in a timely and efficient manner.

13. We address an urgent appeal to all participants in civil society to support the mobilization of financial resources for the fight against desertification.

14. We also agree with the decision of the WSSD to support the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in order to promote regional cooperation and sustainable development, and we support the creation of the Pan-African Parliament of the African Union which, inter alia, could serve as the African Development Bank's parliamentary overseeing mechanism.

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15. We firmly believe that all major environmental issues are intrinsically linked and require a concerted international effort to address them synergistically. Emphasis should be placed on building up a culture of synergism in the implementation of the Rio conventions, in particular at national level.

16. We fully support all initiatives which aim at encouraging sustainable development promotion in order to ensure the best use of financial and human resources and the effective use of available expertise and comparative advantages, including traditional knowledge, in both developed and developing countries as well as the public and private sectors.

17. We reaffirm the vital role of local participation in sustainable development.

18. We request all presiding officers to take steps to publicize the present declaration by placing it on the agenda of their national parliaments or by bringing it to the attention of all members of their parliament in some other appropriate way.

III. We endorse a Parliamentary Action Plan, taking into account the Parliamentary Declaration on the occasion of the WSSD adopted unanimously on the occasion of the Parliamentary Meeting organized jointly by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Parliament of South Africa (Johannesburg, 29-30 August 2002). We recognize the unique role of parliamentarians in scrutinizing, monitoring and holding national governments to account in respect of the implementation of international agreements and we shall work to put in place:

- (a) New regulatory and administrative foundations to make the integrated approach to sustainable development permeate every act of government;
- (b) National strategies for sustainable development that include a measure of decentralisation of public and private institutions for appropriate local decisions in order to provide a coherent policy framework and measurable targets;
- (c) Requirements for thorough environmental and social impact assessments;
- (d) Systems providing access to information relevant to people, decision makers and others;
- (e) Regulations to implement new and rigorous methods of green accounting in both public and private sectors;
- (f) Democratic institutions and processes which are accountable, which allow for consultation with, and input from, civil society, which abide by the rule of law and which respect fundamental human rights and human dignity.

We acknowledge that parliaments represent a basis for good governance grounded on democratic institutions responsive to the needs of the people, anti-corruption measures, gender equality and a favourable atmosphere and environment for investment.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Cf. IPU Resolution *Parliaments' Role in Strengthening Democratic Institutions and Human Development in a Fragmented World*, adopted unanimously by the 108th Conference (Santiago de Chile, 11 April 2003).

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19. We propose the creation - under the auspices of the Inter-Parliamentary Union - of a Parliamentary Network on the UNCCD (PNoUNCCD), a network of information, interaction and influence with the aim of increasing parliamentary involvement and efficiency in the fields of combating desertification, soil erosion and land degradation, of pooling information and of ensuring greater parliamentary input into international negotiations and organizations.

20. We request the active involvement of elected representatives at a national (or regional) level and the strengthening of the capacity of national parliaments to influence and monitor their governments' actions. We undertake to promote in our respective parliaments:

- (a) The strengthening of national legislation and its harmonization with the provisions of the UNCCD, and the streamlining of NAPs, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and country programmes supported by the donor community with anti-desertification needs;
- (b) The pursuit of coherent and better coordinated policies in the area of anti-poverty and sustainable human development strategies including anti-desertification, the enhancement of synergies between the Rio conventions and the building-up of a culture of coordination of the NAPs with other national development priorities;
- (c) The creation of specific anti-land degradation budget lines and the observance of consistent budget strategies appropriately integrating foreign assistance into a country's own development plans;
- (d) The monitoring of executive actions and control if anti-desertification issues are included in overall government agendas (by means of oral and written questions to ministers, committee hearings and so on);
- (e) The submission of regular 'green accounting' reports on the state of combating poverty and land/natural resource degradation as well as progress achieved (by a Parliamentary or a Government Commissioner for Future Generations), thus providing citizens with the information needed to hold governments accountable and ensuring an effective process within parliaments for reviewing progress with regard to the economic, social, environmental and political aspects of sustainable development at the national level, but also in order to monitor the international agenda for sustainable development;
- (f) The mobilization of public opinion and the raising of awareness on sustainable human development and anti-desertification issues through campaigns, annual events (World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought on 17 June), special parliamentary debates, environmental education, the involvement of schools, academics and artists, and commemorative postage stamps;
- (g) Partnership-building between policy makers, the academic community, the business sector and non-governmental organizations;

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- (h) Forms of international, regional and subregional cooperation favourable to improving relations between the relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and actors, including - if necessary - parliamentary diplomatic activities;
- (i) With respect to the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference in Doha, Qatar, further examination of the relationship between trade, environment and development and actions, particularly to reduce the current system of agricultural export subsidies and barriers to the import of food from developing countries, the increase of Official Development Assistance as promised in Monterrey, and the realization of the WSSD Plan of Implementation.

21. We are determined to ensure the effective and timely implementation of the UNCCD at country and regional level through appropriate measures.

IV. Finally, as members of parliament, we request the secretariat of the UNCCD, with the assistance of the Inter-Parliamentary Union:

22. To organize the next round table of members of parliament in conjunction with the seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention.

23. To take follow-up action on the decisions of the present round table and to develop strategies in order to achieve universal awareness of the declarations and progress reports of the parliamentary round table process with respect to the implementation of the UNCCD.
