



## UNCCD COP 12 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 12 OCTOBER 2015

The twelfth session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP 12) opened in Ankara, Turkey, on Monday afternoon, 12 October 2015. Following meetings of regional groups during the morning, the opening plenary offered delegates the opportunity to exchange opening statements regarding the COP 12 agenda items and their expectations for the Conference.

### OPENING PLENARY

Leading delegates in observing a moment of silence, Pohamba Shifeta, Minister of Environment and Tourism, Namibia, and President of COP 11, opened COP 12 and expressed solidarity with those who had been affected by the recent attacks in Ankara. Noting that sustainable rangeland management is a key priority for his country, he said the recent adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will help to raise the profile of desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) issues on the political agenda, and called for sufficient resources to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN).

Delegates then elected Veysel Eroğlu, Minister of Forestry and Water Affairs, Turkey, as COP 12 President. In his opening remarks, Eroğlu stressed that climate change, desertification and drought are amongst the foremost global challenges today, directly affecting 1.5 billion people. He highlighted Turkey's efforts to enhance sustainable land management (SLM), including the "one sapling per person" national afforestation campaign and the "Road to Ankara" initiative to engage the business community, and noted his country's willingness to share its expertise with other countries in order to meet LDN goals.

Melih Gökçek, Mayor of Ankara, identified efforts to enhance the city's green spaces per capita and noted that, when he came into office in 1994, Ankara had approximately two square meters of green space per person but said it has increased substantially while population doubled in the same period. He shared a video depicting efforts to combat desertification and increase green spaces in the city and province of Ankara.

Monique Barbut, Executive Secretary, UNCCD, said the Convention is an "organization in motion" and noted the increased recognition of land issues at the global level, highlighting the inclusion of the LDN target in the SDGs and the acknowledgement of the role of land in climate change negotiations. She stressed that "daring decisions" are needed

at COP 12 if LDN is to be a quantifiable target for guiding the Convention over the next 15 years and noted the importance of better ways to measure progress, including reducing the frequency of national reports. Barbut called for flexibility to adopt a zero nominal growth budget, but cautioned against taking commitments that are not linked to additional funding.

Nicolas Hulot, Special Advisor to the President of France, stated that success at the Paris Climate Change Conference relies on three factors: humility, solidarity and truth. He stressed the need to recognize that: living in harmony with nature is a strength; desertification and climate change are linked; and an economic model based on cooperation, justice and fair trade must be developed. He recalled Pope Francis' message of the three basic needs, "work, roof, land," which Hulot said can all be affected by extreme climate events.

### STATEMENTS BY REGIONAL AND INTEREST

**GROUPS AND UN AGENCIES:** South Africa, for the Group of 77 and China (G-77/CHINA), welcomed the prominence of DLDD issues in the SDGs, and called the goal to achieve LDN by 2030 a "game changer," noting that it would enable countries to address other SDGs including food security, poverty, health, biodiversity, and climate change. He said the UNCCD can now present itself as a cost-effective and efficient instrument to address these challenges. Drawing attention to the forthcoming Paris Climate Change Conference, he called for a strong message from COP 12 on land-based approaches to combat climate change.

Luxembourg, on behalf of the European Union (EU), noted that DLDD remains a complex and largely underestimated global phenomenon, citing estimates by the Economics of Land Degradation (ELD) Initiative that 50 million people could be forced to migrate within the next 50 years. He welcomed the inclusion of a specific goal and target on LDN in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and highlighted links to other international goals and targets, including: the recognition of women's empowerment in sustainable development contained in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda; efforts by the three Rio Conventions and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to develop common progress indicators and enhance synergies in their implementation programmes; and the work of the Convention's Science-Policy Interface (SPI) in improving coordination with other scientific groups.

South Africa, for the AFRICAN GROUP, welcomed the adoption of the LDN target in the framework of the SDGs and stressed the need for a two-pronged approach to achieve a land degradation neutral world by 2030, including SLM practices



and the rehabilitation of already degraded lands through scaling up financial resources and technology, and increased synergies among partners. She called for open discussions on mainstreaming the LDN target into COP 12 decisions.

India, for the ASIA PACIFIC GROUP, underscored the need for COP 12 to ensure that actions aimed at implementing the SDGs and UNCCD are strengthened at all levels and that the role of land-based approaches to climate change adaptation and mitigation are given due attention at the Paris Climate Change Conference. He said the frequency of meetings of the Convention's bodies should not be reduced, at least until the impacts of the SDG and climate change processes on the UNCCD are clarified. He noted the need for specific measures and adequate resources to address the issues of dust and sandstorms and increased resources for the Global Mechanism of the UNCCD (GM) and the GEF.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC), underscored that while the region is home to rich ecosystems, it is also vulnerable to DLDD and phenomena such as El Niño. Acknowledging that the LDN concept has been embraced as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, he called for its clarification, methodology and indicators. He expressed concern regarding the proposed re-structuring of the CRIC and disappointment over the lack of support to GRULAC to hold its regional preparatory meeting.

Portugal, on behalf of the NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN ANNEX, noted that each party is affected in different ways and has different capacities. He stated that Annex IV Parties are willing to remove the bracketed text on the draft LDN definition, and supported the setting of a voluntary target on LDN.

Armenia, on behalf of CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE (CEE), highlighted that COP 12 is important in light of the SDGs, in particular on LDN, and noted that Rio+20 called for UNCCD to be the global authority on land degradation and SLM. He acknowledged the work of the Intergovernmental Working Group (IWG) on LDN. He supported the removal of brackets on text on the LDN definition and noted that a related target would require significant financial resources. He also welcomed the outcomes of the UNCCD 3rd Scientific Conference, and called for further scientific conferences to be held.

UN Development Programme (UNDP) listed UNDP's approach to supporting SLM through: capacity development, advocacy and policy advice; the adoption and demonstration of locally-appropriate technologies and approaches; and assistance to countries to access environmental finance for SLM.

UN Environment Programme (UNEP) highlighted its cooperation with the UNCCD through initiatives such as the Greening Drylands Partnership, and the Landscapes for People, Food and Nature. She also drew attention to UNEP's current portfolio of global SLM projects worth US\$70.5million.

TEMA Foundation, Turkey, for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), noted that unsustainable patterns of development are placing soils under enormous pressure and contributing to increased poverty, displacement and civic disruption. While welcoming the focus on soils and inclusion of the LDN concept within the SDGs, she noted the need to clarify issues around the measurement of impacts, equity and governance. She stressed that any LDN funding mechanism should "allow communities to improve land management and not promote transfer of land to third parties," and called for public-private partnerships to adhere

to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (Voluntary Guidelines).

FAO outlined activities in response to land degradation and water scarcity, including: the Save and Grow approach for sustainable production intensification; integrated landscape management approaches and support to the Great Green Wall of the Sahara and Sahel initiative; development of indicators for LDN; a new vision for forestry to 2050; guidelines for the restoration of degraded lands and lands in drylands; the Voluntary Guidelines; and the Global Soil Partnership.

**ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ELECTION OF OFFICERS:** Delegates adopted the agenda and organization of work with minor amendments presented orally (ICCD/COP(12)/1 and Add.1).

Delegates elected the following candidates as Vice-Presidents of COP 12: Skumsa Mancotywa (South Africa) and Jean Muneng (Democratic Republic of Congo) for Africa; Ashot Vardevanyan (Armenia) and Vesna Indova (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) for CEE; Felipe Costa (Brazil) and Haendel Sebastian Rodríguez González (Colombia) for GRULAC; and Grammenos Mastrojeni (Italy) and a representative from Turkey for the Western European and Other States.

Delegates then established a Committee of the Whole (COW) to consider the following agenda items: implications for the UNCCD of the post-2015 development agenda; effective implementation of the Convention; programme and budget; and procedural matters including the request by Annex V regarding the mandate and scope of the Convention.

Delegates also adopted the document on accreditation of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and admissions of observers (ICCD/COP(12)/15), noting *inter alia*, that 314 CSOs were accredited for COP 12.

### IN THE CORRIDORS

As participants expressed their solidarity with Turkey in light of the terrorist attack in Ankara on the eve of COP 12, some noted that it strengthened their resolve to work together to address DLDD issues through the COP 12 agenda. Others noted renewed enthusiasm to engage in the Convention, stemming from the inclusion of LDN and other land-related targets in the recently adopted SDGs, as well as synergies with the agenda of the upcoming Paris Climate Change Conference and with objectives within the Convention on Biological Diversity. Some pointed out that, while the MDGs had not included land issues, several SDG targets require addressing these issues. They welcomed what they deemed an opportunity to reposition the UNCCD within the international development agenda – a crucial connection they said had thus far proved elusive. Nonetheless, many noted that COP 12 delegates will need to work hard if they are to capitalize on this opportunity, as discussions on LDN are expected to encompass talks on the scope of the Convention and other challenging issues. Civil society representatives, for example, cautioned that a greater role for the private sector in LDN investments could exacerbate the displacement of rural communities. Discussions on these issues moved offline during the evening, as delegates enjoyed a generous buffet of Turkish delights from their hosts and prepared to commence negotiations.