

UNCCD COP 13 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 11 SEPTEMBER 2017

On Monday, 11 September, UNCCD COP 13 delegates gathered for the High-Level Segment. A message was delivered on behalf of Xi Jinping, President of China, after which other dignitaries addressed delegates. Roundtables were held in the afternoon, with a Business Forum also taking place.

HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT

OPENING: COP 13 President Zhang Jianlong welcomed delegates to the High-Level Segment, followed by a video showcasing Chinese achievements in combating desertification.

Wang Yang, Vice Premier, delivered a message by Xi Jinping, President, China, emphasizing the priority of ecological preservation, and the importance of prevention in combating desertification and land degradation. Wang then, in a keynote address, acknowledged the effective role played by the Convention in attaining global common ground towards addressing desertification, and emphasized: the importance of setting up a global ecological cooperation system; promoting communication and experience sharing among parties; encouraging incentives for countries to solve desertification; and promoting green development to improve people's livelihoods holistically.

In a video message, UN Secretary-General António Guterres noted that measures to combat land degradation are central to the 2030 Agenda and urged COP 13 to be bold in delivering concrete solutions to the challenges faced.

UNCCD Executive Secretary Monique Barbut noted that with a revised Strategic Framework and bold land degradation neutrality (LDN) targets, the Convention is "at an exciting point." Stressing the negative consequences of desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD), she encouraged delegates to learn from, and employ, the many examples of land restoration, including China's efforts to restore 6,000 square kilometers of the Kubuqi desert, which has lifted 100,000 people out of poverty.

STATEMENTS ON BEHALF OF REGIONAL AND INTEREST GROUPS, AS WELL AS CSOS: María Victoria Chiriboga, Undersecretary of Climate Change, Ecuador, on behalf of G-77/CHINA, reiterated commitment to effective engagement in the COP, and called for: strengthening the Strategic Framework and LDN indicators; and increasing regionally-specific responses to drought and global efforts to address sand and dust storms.

Richard Mwendandu, Director of Multilateral Environmental Agreements, Ministry of Environment, Kenya, for the AFRICAN STATES, highlighted the need to focus on transformative projects to implement the LDN targets, which requires political commitment and up-scaled finance.

Rawea Mizel Mahmood, General Director, Forests and Desertification Directorate, Ministry of Agriculture, Iraq, for ASIA-PACIFIC STATES, welcomed the inclusion of the specific objective on drought in the new Strategic Framework, and underscored LDN as a vehicle for the implementation of the Convention, highlighting collaboration among the Rio Conventions and capacity development as priority areas.

Ion Perju, Advisor to the President on Agro-Industrial and Public Administration Issues, Moldova, on behalf of CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE (CEE), noted that 11 countries from the CEE have been involved in the process to achieve LDN, with two setting national targets. He urged inclusion of drought into the COP's outcome document, and welcomed extending Science-Policy Interface (SPI).

Lina Pohl, Minister of Environment, El Salvador, for GRULAC, said the new Scientific Framework, and agreements on financing, technology transfer and capacity building are significant outcomes of COP 13. She called for resources to enable Regional Coordination Units and the CRIC to fulfil their support role to parties.

Siim Kiisler, Minister of Environment, Estonia, on behalf of EU, highlighted the importance of: engaging local communities and other non-state actors; translating sound science into practical policy recommendations; and engaging multi-lateral institutions and the private sector for financing.

Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, M'Boro Indigenous Women and People Association, Chad, on behalf of CSOs, called on parties to adopt the COP decision on land rights to ensure millions of farmers, local communities, indigenous peoples and women have secure access to land, as fundamental to achieving the goal of the Convention.

Yang Liu, Chinese Academy of Forestry, for YOUTH, encouraged governments and all stakeholders to: commit to equal and quality education for all youth, particularly women; support investments in green economy to increase attraction of green jobs for young people; and support opportunities for exchange and volunteering experiences for youth.

GEF CEO Naoko Ishii lauded China's commitment through its local practices in controlling desertification, and emphasized: countries' commitment to achieve LDN targets provides a strong vehicle to drive implementation of UNCCD; promotion of holistic land management is key to biodiversity, and addressing water and climate change issues; the need for the private sector to involve smallholder farmers; and that the LDN Fund should embrace partnerships with the private sector.

Joseph Chennoth, Apostolic Nuncio to Japan, the HOLY SEE, delivered a message from Pope Francis. He expressed gratification for efforts at COP 13 to awaken the interest and commitment of young people and hoped that, while dealing with specific issues and goals, COP 13 will adopt an integrated approach linking to wider issues confronting humanity.

ROUNDTABLES: Land degradation: a challenge to development, prosperity and peace: The roundtable was chaired by Sydney Alexander Samuels Milson, Minister of Environment and Natural Resources, Guatemala and moderated by Manoel Sobral Filho, Director, UN Forum on Forests. Samuels Milson highlighted that droughts have affected 2.8 million people in Central America, compelling rural people to migrate.

Louise Arbour, UN Special Representative for International Migration, via video, stated that environmental drivers affect migration together with other social, political, economic and demographic factors but that the fundamental linkage is clear. She

welcomed the UNCCD's discussions on migration, pointing to other initiatives, such as the UN global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration.

Abdulrahman Bello Dambazau, Minister of Interior, Nigeria, said desertification and mismanagement of natural resources are contributing to conflict in Nigeria among land users. Noting that land is at the center of the peace and development nexus, he stressed the importance of the Great Green Wall project for combating desertification, thus regenerating land for job creation and preventing migration.

Camara Alahgie, President, Gambian Returnees Association, recounted his own experience as a migrant, common to thousands of young Africans, after which he started an association that helps young Gambians remain in the country.

Several countries acknowledged the links between desertification, land degradation, poverty and migration, and the need for a better understanding of these linkages, supported by data, in order to address the root causes. Several delegates described conflicts resulting from natural resources mismanagement and DLDD, and CHAD, INDONESIA, TURKEY and PAKISTAN shared national level actions to rehabilitate lands and promote land-based employment generation to stop outmigration, outlining approaches such as agroforestry systems. CANADA and SWITZERLAND noted that women are disproportionately affected by DLDD impacts. MALI and others called for decentralization and participatory policies in the agriculture and land-use sectors. ETHIOPIA urged addressing bottlenecks such as limited access to finance for land rehabilitation. CSOs called for alliances with all land users.

SOUTH AFRICA expressed concerns that a focus on migration in the strategic framework is premature, while ITALY suggested reinforcing the migration dimension in the UNCCD.

The WORLD BANK, INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION and FAO reported on their activities on landscape restoration, migration and land cover data collection respectively.

Drought and sand and dust storms: early warning and beyond: Opening the session, Chair Abdullah Ahmed Al-Sabah, Director-General, Environment Public Authority, Kuwait, said sand and dust storms (SDS) in his country account for US\$190 million in losses annually.

Moderator Erik Solheim, UN Environment Executive Director, proposed three discussion questions: how to strengthen regional cooperation; how to improve science and data; and how to scale up successful practices.

Noting her country has experienced six dry years in a row, Lina Pohl, Minister of Environment, El Salvador, discussed the development of a drought early warning system, a reforestation programme, and a land management strategy.

Oppah Muchinguri, Minister of Environment and Climate, Zimbabwe, highlighted the impacts of drought on rural communities, especially women and children.

Discussant Zhang Xinsheng, President, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), emphasized nature-based solutions through, *inter alia*, restoring the ecosystem functions of soil, scaling up land rehabilitation, and mainstreaming sustainable land management.

NAMIBIA highlighted the outcomes of the first African Drought Conference in 2016. US noted that no region is immune to drought, and, with TURKEY, favored a focus on implementation rather than developing a drought protocol.

IRAN highlighted the outcomes of the first international conference on SDS in Tehran and described efforts to rehabilitate Lake Urmia. Stressing that drought and SDS are different but interrelated global phenomena TURKEY highlighted the Ankara Initiative's support to African countries and reported that it is hosting a regional SDS virtual forecasting centre. CUBA stressed the importance of political will in tackling DLDD.

Many speakers underscored the value of partnerships, financing and technical transfer to strengthen resilience. CANADA encouraged involving partners in existing platforms on drought, meteorology and agriculture. Romania, for the EU, highlighted the role of the UNCCD's SPI in integrating

early warning data. SOUTH AFRICA called attention to the little explored issue of urban-rural linkages. STATE OF PALESTINE described China's restoration efforts as inspirational. VENEZUELA attributed Cuba's resilience to natural disasters to its early warning system. BENIN noted that current indicators and tools are not meeting the real needs on the ground. KUWAIT highlighted its efforts to deal with local causes of drought and SDS. JORDAN and CSOs stressed the importance of engaging local communities.

The World Meteorological Organization described its partnership with the UNCCD and FAO, including organizing six regional drought management workshops, and its SDS early warning systems organized around regional nodes.

Land degradation neutrality: "From targets to action... what will it take?" The session was chaired by Johanita Ndahimananjara, Minister of Environment, Madagascar, who challenged countries to share how they will move from commitments to actions.

Moderator Cristiana Paşca Palmer, Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity, challenged countries to identify what it will take to: move from targets to actions; design national LDN targets; and attain adequate resources to achieve LDN targets and unlock private sector investment.

Gustavo Fonseca, Head, Natural Resources Team, the GEF, shared lessons in providing technical and financial support to countries in developing LDN targets, including: the need to look beyond the land degradation focal area for resource mobilization and to leverage resources from closely-linked projects; and ensuring good governance.

Christopher Knowles, Climate Director, European Investment Bank, highlighted requirements to attain LDN, including political will and leadership at all levels, projects that are bankable and sensible at the economic level, and incorporating the "holy grail" of private sector capital.

BRAZIL and INDIA announced their intention to join the LDN target-setting programme. CHINA, announcing his country's intention to set aside US\$2 million to further address desertification, encouraged all countries to develop ambitious voluntary targets.

Many countries reaffirmed their commitment to LDN, the SDGs and synergies with the Rio Conventions. CHINA, MOROCCO, and others shared their best practices, and many emphasized the co-benefits of synergies among the Rio Conventions.

IUCN underscored that LDN targets are better achieved when addressed as part of a larger initiative, and the EU called for involving stakeholders whose actions directly impact land. NEPAL urged cooperation that "should be people-focused and people-driven." CSOs stressed that LDN will only be achieved if everyone is included, calling for CSOs' inclusion in the Strategic Framework.

MIROVA pointed to financial resources available, as a response to the needs expressed by many countries, and stated that public-private partnerships would occur in addition to domestic resource mobilization. The AFRICAN UNION stated that governments and the private sector should share financial risks and benefits.

IN THE CORRIDORS

The second week of COP 13 started on a high note, as messages from the President of China, the UN Secretary-General and Pope Francis made for a grand opening to the High-Level segment. With CST closed and scientists replaced by ministers and other high-level participants, this week moved into more political parleys, with the roundtable format aiming to allow for consultation with decision makers. As one delegate noted, issues tackled today, such as the linkages between land degradation and migration, and the new initiative on drought, are presently dividing parties rather than connecting them. Many hoped that the two days of high-level interactions will generate the necessary energy to reach consensus on the final decisions, although on that "the jury is still out!"