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THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION IN COUNTRIES EXPERIENCING SERIOUS DROUGHT AND/OR DESERTIFICATION, PARTICULARLY IN AFRICA

Introduction

Land is a primary resource base for sustainable development. Its degradation is therefore a key issue. Nearly 100 countries in all regions of the world and up to one billion people, or nearly 20% of the human race, are affected by desertification.

While all world regions face problems of land degradation, it is compounded in developing countries by the structure of their economies, by their need for land to provide food for rapidly growing populations and by their lack of resources. In Africa, 66% of the continent is estimated to be desert or dryland and 73% of the agricultural drylands are already degraded, as is one-third of land in Asia.

“Desertification is land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities. Desertification affects about one-sixth of the world's population, 70% of all drylands, amounting to 3.6 billion hectares and one-quarter of the total land area of the world. The most obvious impact of desertification, in addition to widespread poverty, is the degradation of 3.3 billion hectares of the total area of rangeland, constituting 73% of the rangeland with a low potential for human and animal carrying capacity; decline in soil fertility and soil structure on about 47% of the dryland areas constituting marginal rainfed cropland; and the degradation of the irrigated cropland, amounting to 30% of the dryland areas with a high population density and agricultural potential.”

The definition of desertification itself has been the subject of debate and controversy, evolving with knowledge. The most widely accepted definition today comes from *Agenda 21*, the blueprint for action produced at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) at Rio de Janeiro in 1992. It is now embodied in the Convention to Combat Desertification.

Human and climate influences—including climate change—share the responsibility for desertification. Desertification does not occur in deserts themselves but in

arid and semi-arid regions or drylands. Before desertification, these areas of dry savanna and scrubland supported vegetation adapted to the climate, which consists of a short wet season and a long dry season. But when these plants cannot revive, the ecosystem's delicate balance is broken, allowing desertification to set in.

Desertification is distinct from drought, which is a period of rainfall shortage; from desiccation, which is a process of aridification caused by a dry period over decades; and broader land degradation. Drought plays a part in desertification, usually worsening it. Moreover, contrary to widespread belief in the wake of the Sahel drought, desertification is not the spread of existing deserts over agricultural lands. This spread is part of the cyclical process of expansion and contraction of the desert fringes and is caused by climate fluctuations.

Among the human activities that contribute to desertification are deforestation, overgrazing, inappropriate dryland farming and poor irrigation management. But people living in the drylands of developing countries, while aware of the effects of their practices on the land, have no alternative if they are to survive under such difficult conditions. Economic, political and social changes are called for if the trend is to be reversed.

Towards a Convention

International efforts to combat desertification can be traced back to 1973, when the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian

This is the first in a new sub-set of *E&D File* under the title 'The Sustainable Development Treaty Series.' Others in the series will cover the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat, and others.

Office (UNSO) was established. Activities originally targeted 22 African drought-prone countries, but subsequently spread.

Other regional initiatives include the creation of the Comité Inter-Etats de Lutte contre la Sécheresse au Sahel after the severe Sahelian drought in 1973. The committee was set up to coordinate African action against drought. The Club du Sahel was set up in 1976 to coordinate programmes by the United States, Canada, Germany and the Netherlands and international organizations (UNSO and the World Bank) for drought-stricken Sahelian countries. The Inter-Governmental Authority on Drought and Desertification (IGADD), which brought together six African countries and the Sahara-Sahel Observatory, was also established during this period.

The UN first addressed desertification at a global level at the 1977 United Nations Conference on Desertification (UNCOD) in Nairobi. The conference recognized desertification as a major economic, social and environmental problem of concern to all countries. It adopted the UN Plan of Action to Combat Desertification (PACD), which consisted of basic guidelines and detailed recommendations. The plan of action aimed to contain the advance of desertification, and to make areas vulnerable to desertification more stable and productive.

After UNCOD, UNEP established the Desertification Control/Programme Activity (DC/PAC) to develop a desertification assessment methodology and assess desertification at a global level; to help countries formulate national action plans to combat desertification; to advocate action at the international level; and to promote training on desertification control.

Other activities to combat desertification in the 1970s and 80s include information systems and project activities developed by NGOs, and studies, research and regional programmes executed by intergovernmental organizations (such as FAO, UNESCO and its Man and the Biosphere Programme, UNEP, International Fund for Agricultural Development, World Meteorological Organization, and so on).

Despite these efforts, the area of land facing desertification and the number of people affected by it have been on the rise. UNEP estimated in 1991 that six million hectares of land were lost to desertification each year, and that the desertification problem had intensified.

Partly in response to such reports, *Agenda 21* recommended a new approach emphasizing action at the community level. Chapter 12 of *Agenda 21* also called on the UN General Assembly (GA) to establish an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INCD) to prepare by June 1994 a convention to combat desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa.

In December 1992, the GA passed resolution 47/188, of which paragraph 2 established an ad hoc secretariat for the INCD, and paragraph 12 a multidisciplinary panel of experts to provide the necessary expertise in the scientific, technical, legal, socioeconomic and related fields. The panel consisted of 15 experts and scientists from all world regions and from a wide range of disciplines, including both the physical and social sciences.

The INCD's organizational session, which took place in New York from 26-29 January 1993, set a tight schedule of five INCD meetings to be held between May 1993 and June 1994.

INCD-1

The first substantive session was held in Nairobi from 24 May-4 June 1993. Around 100 governments, over 100 NGO representatives and a large number of concerned UN agencies, intergovernmental bodies and desertification experts from a range of backgrounds took part in the two-week session, which provided an opportunity for scientists, technical experts, delegates and NGOs to share relevant experiences and learn more about the global dimensions of desertification. They explored themes including the causes, extent and physical consequences of land degradation in arid, semi-arid and sub-humid areas; the social and economic dimensions of desertification; patterns of bilateral and multilateral assistance; experience with programmes at all levels to combat desertification and mitigate drought in developing countries; and possible elements of a new strategy to promote sustainable development. Evidence of desertification and its links with global warming, biodiversity and climate change were presented and a consensus emerged that enough was known about desertification to provide a solid basis for the convention's negotiation.

The INCD secretariat tabled a background document for the first INCD session entitled "Format and possible elements of the convention," and delegates began to exchange ideas about the convention and its objectives. Some delegations emphasized national and local level approaches to the fight against desertification, such as capacity building, while others highlighted the need to deal with international and resource dimensions of the problem such as trade, commodity prices and foreign debt. Other issues aired by governments were the need for better coordination and monitoring of efforts, sources of funding for the convention and the role of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in this regard, linkages with other conventions, further research needs, and cooperation with NGOs.

Mandates were discussed for the two working groups which would meet for INCD-2. Working Group I would deal with the convention's preamble, principles, objectives and commitments, including financial arrangements and capacity building. Working Group II would be responsible for institutional, administrative, technological and scientific provisions, research, data collection and exchange of

information, procedural arrangements and other legal provisions, as well as regional instruments.

But negotiations in Nairobi reached an impasse over the issue of whether the convention's instruments for regions other than Africa should be negotiated simultaneously or subsequently.

INCD-2

The second INCD met in Geneva from 13-24 September 1993 and considered a compilation and analysis of government views on what the convention should include, prepared by the secretariat. As in Nairobi, the most difficult issue was the timing of the negotiation of regional instruments.

In the fields addressed by Working Group I, there was consensus on the main elements to be included in the preamble, objectives, and implementable commitments. Delegations agreed that key points in the convention should be the use of traditional knowledge, the development of local potential and a participatory approach to combating desertification. No consensus was reached on whether a chapter on principles should be included in the convention, on financial resources, or on the inclusion of international issues such as trade and debt.

As for Working Group II issues, the secretariat was asked to prepare a list of key terms and definitions to be discussed and agreed for inclusion in the convention; consensus was reached on integrating traditional knowledge into research and development, better coordination of laboratory research with field activities, consideration of information matters by a panel of experts on desertification, and the importance of better technology to fight desertification—a difficult premise for developing countries. There was also agreement to establish a permanent secretariat to administer the convention and a conference of the parties to be the main decision-making body. There was not agreement, however, on the establishment of other subsidiary bodies in the convention.

One of the main sticking points again concerned the timing and process for negotiation of the regional instruments. The issue became even more complicated when several European countries called for a regional instrument for the Northern Mediterranean. Also contentious was the meaning of the concept of "global" to describe the nature and extent of desertification. Finally, a draft resolution proposed holding an extra INCD session before 31 January 1995, after the adoption of the convention, to review regional instruments. The secretariat was requested to prepare a draft negotiating text of the convention for consideration at the third INCD session.

INCD-3

The third session of the INCD was held in New York from 17-28 January 1994. The two working groups focused on

the draft negotiating text of the convention prepared by the secretariat.

The working groups took up the same sets of issues as in previous meetings. There was a significant step forward when all delegations accepted the secretariat's draft as a basis for negotiation. But outstanding key conceptual and political issues remained, including the scope of the convention, with developing countries wanting to include international economic factors associated with desertification in the convention; definitions of obligations and commitments, and notably the commitment of the donor community to provide developing countries with new and additional funding to implement the convention; the roles of the institutions to be set up by the convention and the possible creation of new subsidiary bodies, including a Scientific and Technical Council and an Evaluation and Monitoring Center, which developed countries were reluctant to finance; and regional instruments.

Also at INCD-3, Working Group II engaged in a general exchange of views on the Regional Implementation Annexes and requested the secretariat to prepare a draft annex for the African region for consideration at the INCD's fourth session.

INCD-4

The fourth session of the INCD was held in Geneva from 21-31 March 1994. The two working groups continued negotiating the draft text of the convention. Substantive problems left by the meeting included: the need for an article on principles in the text; all matters related to financial resources and mechanisms; subsidiary bodies; reservations or exceptions open to the parties; and the obligations of a withdrawing party. Also at INCD-4, governments engaged in a discussion on how to define the categories of countries party to the convention, whether to remain with the traditional categories of developed donor countries and developing recipient countries, and where to place the countries, particularly those of the former Soviet Union, that seemed to fit neither category. To improve dialogue on the issue of financial resources and mechanisms, Canada and the Gambia were asked to undertake informal consultations among delegations on the convention's financial provisions in order to develop a new negotiating text for INCD-5.

The fourth session was also the first time delegates formally considered the Regional Implementation Annex for Africa. The unresolved issues in this heavily bracketed text included: whether the annex could contain obligations and commitments to going beyond those agreed for the main body of the convention; the timetable for preparing action programmes; the role of the UN and other international institutions; financial arrangements; and follow-up and coordination.

The Asian and Latin American regional groups also produced their own background papers on implementation annexes for their regions, the Asian one appending a draft

outline of an annex; although these were not negotiated or even discussed in detail, initial reaction was positive. The secretariat was requested to prepare draft annexes for Asia and Latin America for consideration at the INCD's fifth session.

INCD-5

The fifth and final session of the INCD took place from 6-18 June 1994 at UNESCO headquarters in Paris, with delegates from over 100 governments reaching an eleventh-hour compromise on outstanding contentious issues, the most important of which were financial resources and mechanisms, categories of countries with regard to financial assistance, certain institutional and legal issues, the inclusion of an article on principles, and the regional implementation annexes.

Developing countries, especially in Africa, had high expectations that additional resources would be provided to help them implement the convention; OECD countries were firmly opposed to this, emphasizing instead the need to better use existing resources. Non-African developing countries were eager to make sure their own desertification problems received adequate attention and were concerned to avoid being obligated by the convention to provide assistance to affected countries. Regional divisions came to the fore in the negotiation of regional implementation annexes.

Still, as two weeks of intensive negotiations drew to a close, an all-night session finally culminated in the adoption of the convention and its regional annexes for Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Northern Mediterranean region.

Interim Arrangements

The fifth INCD adopted a resolution on interim arrangements and a resolution on urgent action for Africa for implementation until the convention's entry into force.

The resolution on interim arrangements calls upon states and economic integration organizations to sign the convention when it opens for signature in Paris in the autumn. It also requests the Secretary-General of the United Nations to make appropriate arrangements for the continuation of the signing period in New York during and after the 49th session of the GA; make the necessary arrangements to convene a session of the INCD from 9-20 January 1995 in New York to prepare the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP); make recommendations to the 49th GA regarding arrangements for further sessions of the INCD until the first meeting of the COP; and make proposals so that the secretariat can continue its activities on an interim basis until the permanent secretariat of the COP is established.

The resolution on urgent action for Africa calls on all countries, consistent with the provisions of the convention,

to disseminate information and promote education and public awareness about the convention's objectives; on affected African countries to urgently prepare action programmes; on developed countries, international multilateral organizations, African subregional and regional organizations, and private sector organizations to support African actions; and on the conclusion of partnership arrangements involving affected African countries and relevant developed countries, economic organizations, NGOs and representatives of local populations.

THE CONVENTION

Objective

Following the preamble, which addresses a range of topics related to desertification and drought, and Article 1 which provides agreed definitions of a range of terms, Article 2 states that the objective of the convention is to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought in countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa, through effective action at all levels, supported by international cooperation and partnership arrangements, within the framework of an integrated approach consistent with *Agenda 21*, with a view to contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in affected areas. Article 2 goes on to underline the necessity of implementing long-term integrated strategies aiming simultaneously to improve land productivity and to contribute to the rehabilitation, conservation and sustainable management of land and water resources. The convention's ultimate goal is to improve living conditions as laid down in the preamble, which places human beings in affected or threatened areas at the center of concerns to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought.

Parties should be guided by the four principles set out in Article 3 (an article which remained bracketed until INCD-5): the participation of populations and local communities in the design and implementation of programmes to combat desertification and the creation of an enabling

"Now, I have to stop where this has to come to an end: the machine is there, brand new, in front of us. We only have to know how to use it; the convention as such is only an instrument. We are the constructors of this machine, but the development agents are the others, the hundreds of millions who live in the dry lands. I cannot cease to remember the image I had of the sandstorm in Mauritania: women and men in a struggle for life. At one of our former sessions I emphasized that we should give to these women, to these men, the necessary instruments. Now the instruments are there. The action can begin. It is not diplomacy, drafting texts and phrases, that counts any more. The reality will judge and tell us if this convention will be successful."

**—Bo Kjellén, Chairman of the INCD,
at the closing session of the**

environment at higher levels to facilitate action at national and local levels; cooperation and coordination at all levels (subregional, regional and international) in a spirit of international solidarity and partnership, and a better focus of resources (human, organizational and technical); cooperation among all levels of government, communities, NGOs and landholders; and full consideration to the special needs of affected developing country parties, particularly the least developed among them.

Obligations and Commitments

The convention sets out a series of general obligations for all parties as well as two sets of specific obligations.

Article 4 on general obligations calls on parties to adopt an integrated approach addressing the physical, biological and socioeconomic aspects of the processes of desertification and drought; give due attention to the situation of affected developing country parties with respect to trade, marketing arrangements and debt with a view to promoting sustainable development; integrate strategies for poverty eradication into efforts to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought; promote cooperation among affected parties in fields related to desertification and drought; strengthen subregional, regional and international cooperation; cooperate with relevant international organizations; determine appropriate institutional mechanisms; and promote the use of existing bilateral and multilateral financial mechanisms and arrangements that mobilize and channel substantial financial resources to affected developing countries. With regard to general financial obligations, it was, in the end, agreed not to refer to the development of mechanisms that would provide for new and additional resources, in spite of developing countries' wishes.

According to Article 5, affected countries—countries whose land includes in whole or in part arid, semi-arid and/or dry sub-humid areas affected or threatened by desertification—are under special obligation to give due priority to combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought, and to allocate adequate resources in accordance with their conditions and capabilities; they are called upon to address the underlying causes of desertification; promote awareness and facilitate participation of local populations; and provide an enabling environment by strengthening relevant existing legislation or by enacting new laws and establishing long-term policies.

Special obligations of developed countries include support to affected developing country parties, particularly those in Africa, to develop and implement their own long-term plans and strategies; provide substantial financial and other forms of support; and promote the mobilization of new and additional funding from the GEF of the agreed incremental costs of those activities concerning desertification that relate to the GEF's four focal areas, notably where these activities are linked with preventing climate change and loss of biodiversity.

“The instrument we have adopted, taking into account the accumulated experience in the struggle against desertification, encourages coherence within an integrated programme framework which will take the form of partnership agreements in each country. These will bring together funding agencies, governments, NGOs and local communities. As we all know, the spirit of cooperation and openness which permeated the negotiations must inspire the implementation of the convention. We will have to inform, stimulate and share. This is a long-term undertaking.”

**—Hama Arba Diallo, Executive Secretary,
Secretariat of the INCD, at the Final Plenary**

Article 6, which lays down these obligations, was among the most contentious and was not agreed, with reservations from five developing countries, until the first hours of 18 June 1994. Developing countries initially wanted to link developed countries' obligations to financial resources and mechanisms. This article was also linked to discussions on categories of countries with regard to financial support. The final compromise mentions neither the mobilization of new and additional resources, as supported by the G-77, group of developing countries, nor the target of 0.7% of developed countries' gross national product (GNP) devoted to official development assistance (ODA).

The convention is to be implemented through national action programmes which incorporate long-term strategies to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought; pay particular attention to preventive measures; enhance national climatological, meteorological and hydrological capabilities; promote policies and strengthen institutional frameworks; provide for effective popular participation; and require regular review of implementation. The popular participation requirement highlights the convention's bottom-up approach and reflects the growing recognition of the importance of grassroots groups and NGOs in reaching and mobilizing the people who work the land.

Governance Structure

The COP is the convention's supreme authority. It will meet for the first time not later than a year after the convention enters into force, that is 90 days after it is ratified by the 50th participating country. The next three sessions will be held yearly, with ordinary sessions held each two years thereafter. The COP will review implementation of the convention; promote an exchange of information; establish subsidiary bodies it deems are necessary; and adopt amendments to the convention in accordance with Article 30. The COP will approve a programme and budget for its activities and those of subsidiary bodies. The contentious issues of compensation for use of traditional and local knowledge were settled by removing them from the COP's mandate; the COP may, however, ask national and international organizations with relevant expertise to provide it with necessary information.

Two other bodies are to be set up. The convention establishes a Committee on Science and Technology and provides for the COP to establish a roster of independent experts in relevant fields as a basis for setting up ad hoc expert panels as required.

A permanent secretariat for the convention will be set up by the first COP to prepare the subsequent meetings of the COP and other meetings of subsidiary bodies, produce reports, facilitate assistance to developing country parties, perform secretariat functions determined by the COP, and coordinate activities with other relevant secretariats. The existing secretariat will act on an interim basis pending the designation of the permanent secretariat by the COP.

Annexes

Africa, the continent most affected by drought and desertification, is the convention's priority, although the convention does not neglect other regions.

The Annex for Africa contains provisions for commitments and obligations of both developed and African parties; strategic planning, framework and content of the national, subregional and regional programmes, technical assistance and cooperation, transfer, acquisition and access to environmentally sound technology; and financial resources and coordination, partnership and follow-up arrangements. The annex stresses Africa's particular situation, including its topography, the large number of affected landlocked countries, political instability, and the difficult socioeconomic factors, including poverty and debt. This is also the only regional instrument with concrete commitments for financial contributions. The annex also covers the national action programmes in Africa, including the use of local rather than expensive expatriate experts, and the need for coordination among donors, local governments, NGOs and local people, at all levels. Finally the annex provides for the conclusion of partnership agreements between affected African countries, developed countries and relevant international organizations.

The convention also contains regional implementation annexes for Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Northern Mediterranean.

The Asian annex is general in scope and provides a flexible framework for cooperation under the convention. The Latin America and Caribbean annex is quite similar to the Asian one, although it aims to identify the links between desertification and biodiversity loss, debt issues, and unfavourable international economic and trade practices and other socioeconomic factors. It also stresses the importance of traditional knowledge in implementing the convention in the region.

The regional annex for the Northern Mediterranean, mainly covering Greece, Portugal and Spain, differs

from the other two in that only two economic issues are highlighted, urbanization and agricultural practices. Also, the Northern Mediterranean region is not eligible for financial assistance under the convention.

No reservation may be made to the convention. The convention is deposited with the UN Secretary-General.

NGO Participation

At the first INCD session, 173 development and environment NGOs were accredited to the INCD process. The

NGO Statement at the Final Plenary of the Fifth Session of the INCD on 17 June 1994 in Paris (France)

Mr. Chairman, we hold the view that although the convention text has been finalized, the real challenge of the implementation still lies ahead. In this regard, Mr. Chairman, NGOs call on the entire international community to show sufficient moral and political will to implement the convention.

We would like to highlight a few aspects:

1. The convention makes many references to participation by those at the community level, women in particular, that are affected by desertification. However, the mechanisms to make this happen need to be developed still. In partnership with the national governments and donors, NGOs are prepared to help develop these mechanisms.

2. Desertification Funds as mentioned in Article 21 could be one of these mechanisms and we urge national governments and donors to work together with NGOs in establishing these funds.

3. Issues that are not adequately addressed in the convention are:

- land tenure system;
- the impact of trade on arid and semi-arid lands;
- capacity building of community groups; and
- NGO involvement in scientific and technical consultations.

Therefore NGOs will continue emphasizing these issues.

4. We deeply regret that the convention does not contain commitments for new and additional funding. This will be a major, if not decisive, constraint in achieving the objectives of the convention.

5. Indigenous knowledge and experiences of local communities and the need to protect their rights over this property.

Mr. Chairman, NGOs believe that the convention can make a difference. We are returning home with a strong will to continue and to promote anti-

first INCD was preceded by a meeting of African NGOs in May 1993 which produced the "African Environment and Development NGO Statement on Combating Desertification" and by an international NGO preparatory meeting hosted by the Environment Liaison Centre International (ELCI) which, building upon the African NGO statement, produced a joint policy statement which was delivered to the plenary.

Between the first and the second INCD, NGOs gathered in Bamako (Mali) to discuss the outcome of the first INCD and prepare further NGO inputs into the negotiating process. This conference was supported by the INCD secretariat and NGLS. The Bamako Statement produced by the conference was accepted as the NGO contribution to the second INCD meeting.

By INCD-2, more than 230 NGOs had been accredited to the INCD process. INCD-2 was attended by 50 NGOs representing 32 countries with several NGO statements delivered in plenary and to the working groups. Issues raised by NGOs included the need to take local land ownership practices into consideration, efficient national action programmes, availability of financial resources, creation of local information centers, the impact of international economic relations such as trade and debt, and the participation of local people in decision making.

By the start of the third session, the total number of accredited NGOs had increased to 279, with 41 attending the third session, a significant number of which were from Africa. Several NGO representatives expressed concern about the low level of participation of NGOs from other regions, including Europe and North America. In addition to statements delivered in plenary session and participation in the work of working groups, NGOs were, on occasion and at the discretion of the Chair, permitted to comment on the texts under negotiation. In the second week of the third session, NGO participation was galvanized by the NGO proposal to establish National Desertification Trust Funds managed by a board made up of national governments, the donor community and representatives of civil society, such as NGOs and community groups. The trust funds were proposed as mechanisms through which activities to combat desertification could be financed at the national level.

During the fourth INCD session, NGOs continued to stress the importance of issues such as the setting up of proper financial mechanisms at the local level, land tenure practices and traditional production methods, agricultural trade and subsidies, and people's participation in the struggle against desertification.

At the fifth INCD, seven more NGOs were accredited to the negotiating process, bringing the total to 300. NGOs emphasized that new and additional funds should go hand in hand with improving financial mechanisms in terms of coordination, transparency, accountability and impact at the local level, and would be decisive in achieving the

convention's objectives. To this end, NGOs reiterated their proposal for National Desertification Trust Funds. This point was partially endorsed in Article 21 of the convention concerning financial mechanisms, which explicitly mentions possible NGO participation in channeling financial resources to the local level in affected developing countries. However, despite their efforts, NGOs were not granted a role in the Committee on Science and Technology or in the roster of experts.

Throughout the INCD process, NGOs were also able to air their concerns and promote their views through informal briefings, meetings with government delegations and the daily publication of the NGO newsletter *ECO* during each INCD session.

NGOs are now preparing for the implementation of the convention. To facilitate their participation in the preparation of action plans, the NGOs at the fourth and fifth sessions of the INCD set up a network, the "Réseau international d'ONG sur la désertification (RIOD)" (International NGO Network on Desertification). RIOD will operate at the community, national, subregional, regional and international levels with one focal point in each country, subregion and region. At the international level an interregional committee of NGOs—one each for Latin America, Asia, Europe, Australia, North America and Africa—is to be established. These focal points are to serve on an interim basis until they are confirmed by a larger assembly of NGOs at a meeting to be held possibly in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) this autumn.

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Follow-up

The convention will be opened for signature at a ceremony at ministerial level to be held in Paris on 14-15 October 1994. Thereafter it will remain open for signature in New York until 13 October 1995.

The 49th General Assembly will have to mandate the secretariat to keep functioning after its existing mandate expires in January 1995, and until the convention enters into force. As called for by the fifth INCD, the 49th GA will have to make arrangements for further meetings of the INCD until the first meeting of the COP.

The sixth session of the INCD is to meet in New York from 9-20 January 1995 to adopt an agenda and work programme for the interim period; prepare the first COP; and review the situation as to extrabudgetary funds and the status of signature and ratification of the convention.

Further Reading

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**The final text of the convention is available from:
The Interim Secretariat for the Intergovernmental
Committee for a Convention to Combat
Desertification (DPCSD/INCD), Geneva Executive
Center, 11-13 chemin des Anémones, CH-1219
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