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ENGLISH ONLY

## DECLARATION ADOPTED BY MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

*Fifth Round Table of Members of Parliament  
Havana, 3 and 4 September 2003  
in parallel with the sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the  
United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification*

### **The role of members of parliament in promoting sustainable human development at national level in the context of a successful implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification**

**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 degradation of land, the loss of forests, topsoil and biodiversity due to the intensification of desertification, and the effects of climatic variations and their direct consequences for global equilibrium, particularly in so far as they relate to food production and availability, to the disruption of traditional migration flows and to human security,

***Conscious of*** the global threat which lies in the continuing degradation of the land that sustains us,

***Mindful*** of the direct causal links 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, educational, economic, environmental and cultural services and opportunities,

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***Bearing in mind*** that desertification and drought have a special and negative impact on living conditions, including food security, health and water quality,

***Recalling*** the United Nations Millennium Development Goals,<sup>1</sup> the outcomes of major United Nations conferences and summits, and in particular the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD)<sup>2</sup> and the Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development,<sup>3</sup> which define a complete vision for the future of humanity and provide a comprehensive basis for action at the national, regional and international level, with the key objectives of poverty eradication, sustained economic growth, sustainable development and an improvement in the living conditions of people everywhere,

***Underlining*** the relevance of water and access to water for combating desertification, and welcoming the outcome of the third World Water Forum,<sup>4</sup> which recommended actions for sustainable water resource management vital for combating desertification,

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

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

*Declare that*

1. We are deeply alarmed by 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, at times accompanied by large-scale movements of displaced people and by armed conflicts;
4. We are conscious of the fact that the established trends of natural renewable and non-renewable resource exploitation and the current patterns of consumption have by far exceeded the earth's carrying capacities;

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<sup>1</sup> Adopted at the United Nations Millennium Summit held from 6 to 8 September 2000 in New York.

<sup>2</sup> Adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 26 August to 4 September 2002.

<sup>3</sup> International Conference on Financing for Development, Monterrey, Mexico, from 18 to 22 March 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Kyoto, Japan, from 17 to 22 March 2003.



5. We are convinced that addressing poverty eradication, particularly widespread environment-induced poverty (generated, *inter alia*, by the increasing lack of water) 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 recognize that the land feeding us, and particularly what is known as its topsoil layer, are a precious resource requiring imperative, urgent, concerted and worldwide protection;
7. We firmly believe that public policies should be clearly oriented towards eliminating the root causes of poverty through participative and democratic processes leading to the real and efficient empowerment of communities, especially women and youth, at the front line of the sustainable development struggle;
8. We underline our conviction that growth cannot constitute an objective per se nor a justification for environmental degradation and should therefore be accompanied by social policies 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;
9. We reaffirm all the measures to combat desertification promoted by the previous round tables of parliamentarians, including sustainable land use and erosion control, rehabilitation of degraded land, effective reforestation programmes and sustainable forest, water and land management, use of renewable sources of energy, capacity building and environmental education programmes;
10. We acknowledge the encouraging signs of progress contained in the 151 national reports which were submitted to the UNCCD for review in Rome, Italy, from 11 to 22 November 2002; however, we deplore the fact that too often national poverty eradication programmes supported by the donor community do not take desertification issues sufficiently into account;
11. We recognize that prevailing macro-economic policies may have a great impact on the process of impoverishment, and we therefore call upon developed countries, in conformity with the letter and spirit of the Convention, to take appropriate action to relieve 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*:
  - Relieving external debt
  - Reducing interest rates
  - Removing barriers to freer and fairer trade
  - Facilitating access to essential drugs to combat pandemics.

**II. *In affirming our commitment***, as members of parliament, to support sustainable human development, we note with appreciation the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), which aim to strengthen the implementation of the Convention in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification,



particularly in Africa, to address the 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 WSSD declarations of intent are followed up with definite actions.

In this regard:

12. 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 therefore welcome the decision of the GEF Assembly, in Beijing, China, in 2002 to endorse this request 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, as approved by the GEF Council in May 2003.
13. We strongly support the decision by the VI Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD at its sixth session held in Havana, Cuba, in 2003 to designate the GEF as an operational financial mechanism of the UNCCD, in order to provide it with substantial and predictable financial resources that will enable it to achieve its objectives in a timely and efficient manner.
14. We address an urgent appeal to all civil-society participants to support the mobilization of financial resources for the fight against desertification.
15. 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 oversight mechanism.
16. We propose the establishment of a parliamentary oversight mechanism for the Global Environment Facility.
17. We firmly believe that all major environmental issues are intrinsically linked and require a concerted international effort if they are to be addressed synergistically. Emphasis should be placed on building up a culture of synergism in the implementation of the Rio conventions, in particular at national level.
18. 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 in the public and private sectors.
19. We reaffirm the vital role of local participation in sustainable development.
20. We reiterate our support to multilateral, governmental, non-governmental and volunteer action at all levels for promoting forestation, reforestation, rural



agricultural development and sustainable alternative livelihood development in the context of UNCCD implementation.

21. 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 parliaments in some other appropriate way.

**III. We endorse a parliamentary action plan**, taking into account the Parliamentary Declaration on the occasion of the WSSD, which was adopted unanimously at the Parliamentary Meeting organized jointly by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Parliament of South Africa (Johannesburg, 29 and 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 decentralization 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 timely access to information relevant to people, decision-makers and others;
- (e) Regulations to implement new and rigorous methods of green accounting in both the 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 can contribute decisively to good governance grounded on democratic institutions responsive to the needs of the people, on anti-corruption measures, gender equality and a favourable atmosphere and environment for investment.<sup>5</sup>

22. 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 aimed at increasing parliamentary involvement and efficiency in the fields of combating desertification, soil erosion and land degradation, at pooling information and at ensuring greater parliamentary input into international negotiations and organizations, to be facilitated by a parliamentary steering committee with the technical support of the UNCCD secretariat.

23. We request the active involvement of elected representatives at regional, subregional, national and local level and the strengthening of the capacity of

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. IPU Resolution *Parliaments' Role in Strengthening Democratic Institutions and Human Development in a Fragmented World*, adopted unanimously by the 108<sup>th</sup> Conference (Santiago de Chile, 11 April 2003).



parliaments and their members to influence and monitor their governments' actions. We undertake to promote in our respective parliaments, as appropriate:

- (a) The strengthening of national legislation and its harmonization with the provisions of the UNCCD, and the streamlining of desertification issues in national action programmes (NAPs), Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and country programmes supported by the donor community;
- (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 budget lines for combating land degradation 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 of whether desertification issues are included in overall government agendas (by means of oral and written questions to ministers, motions, committee hearings and so on);
- (e) The submission of regular 'green accounting' reports on the state of combating poverty, on land and natural resource degradation and on the progress achieved (by a Parliamentary or 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 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 and community-based organizations;
- (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) Further examination, in the light of the outcome of the Fourth World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference, held in Doha, Qatar, in November 2001, of the relationship between trade, environment and development, and actions undertaken in particular to reduce the current system of subsidizing agricultural production and exports as well as to dismantle the barriers to the import of food from developing countries, to the increase of official development assistance as promised in Monterrey, and to the realization of the WSSD Plan of Implementation.



24. We are determined to ensure the effective and timely implementation of the UNCCD at country and regional level through appropriate measures, including the submission of national action programmes by all the affected country Parties.

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

25. 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;
26. To take follow-up action on the decisions of the present round table and to develop strategies to achieve universal awareness of the declarations and progress reports of the parliamentary round table process in respect of UNCCD implementation.

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