

Information to Participants

Arrangements for the Fifth regional meeting of Asian focal points in preparation of the CRIC

8 – 12 July, Damascus, Syria

A Basic information on the conference venue and logistical arrangements

1) Venue

The meeting will be held at the Cham Palace Hotel, Damascus, Syria, at the following address:

Maysaloun Street
P.O.Box 7570
Damascus, Syria
Tel: (00963 11) 22 32 200
Fax: (00963 11) 223 23 20

2. Registration

Registration for national delegates, specialized agencies and United Nations programmes, and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations will be held at a designated area within the premises of the hotel. Registration will start Sunday 7 July 6 – 8 p.m. and Monday 8 July 8 – 9.30 a.m.

Participants are requested to fill the attached registration form (see Annex 1) and send it to:

Ms. Rossana Fazzolari
Secretariat of the UNCCD
Haus Carstanjen
Martin Luther King Str. 8
D-53175 Bonn, Germany
Fax: (0049 228) 815 2898/9
Tel: (0049 228) 815 2823

3. Travel and DSA for funded participants

The air tickets will be provided to the funded participants by the UNCCD Secretariat, or where necessary, through UNDP field offices.

DSA shall be paid upon arrival in a designated area in the hotel. Disbursement of DSA will start Monday 8 July 3 – 6 p.m to sponsored participants in accordance with UN rules and regulations.

Contact person for travel and DSA at the UNCCD Secretariat until 5 July 2002, Bonn, Germany:

Ms. Rossana Fazzolari
UNCCD
Haus Karstanjen
Martin Luther King Str. 8
D-53175 Bonn, Germany
Fax: (0049 228) 815 2898/9
Tel: (0049 228) 815 2823

4) Accommodation

Participants will be accommodated at the Cham Palace Hotel at UN rates i.e 60 \$ a night. Hotel bookings will be made automatically upon receipt of official nominations from country Parties by the Secretariat in cooperation with the focal point. Since the UNCCD Secretariat would have to facilitate security clearances for all participants, delegates are requested to inform the conference organizers on any change in the choice of accommodation. **Due to the fact that security clearance will have to be arranged for everybody attending the meeting, the participants are requested to stay at least the first night in the Cham Palace Hotel.**

Please find in annex 1, a list of hotels that should facilitate your choice of accommodation if you wish to change.

5) Restaurants, cafeteria and bars

There are restaurants in the Cham Palace Hotel, as well as many restaurants within walking distance of the hotel.

Abu Kamal Restaurant
Tel: 222 42 65 / 22 111 59
Lunch and diner meals

Rayyan Restaurant
Tel: 444 56 43 / 232 1882
Lunch and diner meals

Station One Restaurant
Tel: 333 45 75 / 333 62 24
Abu Rumaneh Noura Bus Station
Lunch and diner + fast food

Morocco Restaurant
Tel: 333 24 10 / 331 05 11
Abu Rumaneh Noura Bus Station
Lunch and diner + fast food

Popeye
Tel: 33 19 517

Al-Kamal Restaurant
Tel: 232 3572

Abu Rumaneh Noura Bus Station
Fast Food

29 Ayyar St.
Lunch and dinner meals

Al-Sihi Restaurant
Tel: 232 22 15 / 22 11 555
Abed St. Sharaf Ave.
Lunch and diner meals

6) Banking services

Opposite the Cham Palace Hotel, you will find the Commercial Bank of Syria where traveller cheques and/or other currencies can be exchanged into Syrian pounds.

B Organization of the regional meeting

1) The meeting languages:

The meeting will be conducted in English with interpretation services for Arabic, Chinese and Russian.

Background documents will also be provided in translation (Arabic, Chinese, and Russia). However, it is to be noted that the text containing the final outcome of the meeting i.e. the text of the conclusions and recommendations will be adopted in English.

2) Tentative annotated agenda and programme of work of the meeting:

The tentative annotated agenda, as well as the tentative programme of work is attached in Annex 2

3) National Reports

Delegations wishing to distribute their national report, or information material pertaining to the UNCCD implementation are requested to provide appropriate number of hardcopies to the conference organizers for subsequent distribution. No photocopying service is available for this purpose.

4) Technical issues relating to the presentations of national report during the meeting

With reference to the tentative programme of work attached in annex 2, participants who will present their national report at the meeting are kindly requested to provide to the UNCCD Secretariat in Bonn, by 15 June (contact Ms. Rossana Fazzolari, e-mail: rfazzolari@unccd.int), electronic copies of final versions of their presentation (Power Point 97, word documents).

As recommended in the AHWG report, participants are requested to use power point and/or transparencies in order to illustrate their presentations.

The Secretariat will test and copy the presentations on CD ROMs in order to ensure a smooth technical operation of the presentation segment of the meeting. Electronic presentations, other than by e/mail must be provided either on DOS-formatted diskettes, CD-ROMs or ZIP-diskettes. Other formats are not supported. **Failure to meet these requirements might seriously hamper the technical operation of the meeting and inflict unnecessary delays.**

Participants are usually not intended to connect their own personal laptops to the presentation projector. If this is unavoidable, they are kindly requested to inform the Secretariat in Bonn by 15 June.

Participants wishing to have their presentation distributed in the meeting room are kindly requested to deliver up to 50 copies of their presentation to the conference organizers. The meeting will also be equipped with slide- and overhead projector. In case participants want to use the slide- and overhead projector, please notify the Secretariat in advance and make copies of presentations available to us. Please note that no photocopying service for national reports will be available during the meeting.

5) Format of the presentations

The presentation segment of the meeting will follow the Ad Hoc Working Group (AHWG) format i.e. all affected country Parties that have submitted their report will be able to share their findings with the participants of the meeting.

In order to structure the input emerging from the presentations, and preparing for the subsequent CRIC meeting to be held in November, the key elements identified by COP 5 should be highlighted in those presentations:

- A. Participatory process involving civil society, non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations
- B. Legislative and institutional frameworks or arrangements
- C. Resource mobilization and coordination, both domestic and international, including conclusions of partnership agreements
- D. Linkages and synergies with other environmental conventions and, as appropriate, with national development strategies
- E. Measures for the rehabilitation of degraded land and for early warning systems for mitigating the effects of drought
- F. Drought and desertification monitoring and assessment
- G. Access by affected country Parties, particularly affected developing country Parties, to appropriate technology, knowledge and know-how

Focal Points are requested to make, where possible, qualitative statements with regard to the progress made since the last reporting exercise i.e. during COP 4 and the AHWG.

Less importance should be given to the geographical and/or climatic information by each individual reporting country so as to avoid duplication.

Developed country Parties, UN agencies, and IGOs will also have the opportunity to present reports specifically on their assistance provided to Asian country Parties. The intention to do so should be communicated by those development partners to the Secretariat by 24 May 2002. The Secretariat will upon request allot time slots for such presentations within the given timeframe of the meeting.

C Practical arrangement in Damascus

1) How to get from the airport to the Hotel

All participants will be received at the airport and brought to the Hotel in busses. For those whose participation is not funded, please indicate to Mr. Khaled Al-Sharaa (fax: 00963 11 446 2658 email sharaa-kh@mail.sy) your arrival date in Damascus so that airport pick up can be arranged.

2) Health Requirements

The organizers shall not be responsible for health insurance coverage. Participants should therefore have adequate insurance to cover any medical services required.

3) Visa arrangements

Principally, each participant is requested to obtain a visa from the Syrian embassy or consulate in his/her home country. However, where such representations do not exist, the Syrian government will make available visa arrangements upon arrival at the airport. Participants that need to obtain their visa at the airport are requested to fill in the relevant section in the registration form and send it back to Secretariat.

Please ensure and note very urgently that your passport does not have an Israeli entry stamp in it since the Syrian authorities would deny entry into Syria.

4) General information about Damascus

Damascus is a crowded metropolis of 4 million people and is the chief manufacturing and trading center of Syria. Most of the main sites of interest are found in or near the Old City including the workshops that still make Damask silk brocade, carpets, gold and silver filigree jewelry and beautiful inlaid woodwork.

Despite rapid urbanization, Damascus still retains some of the many orchards and private gardens that made the city famous. It is a delight encountering groves of apricot, almond and quince growing so close to the noisy heart of a modern city. A specialty of Damascus

and a treat not to be missed are crystallized apricots and apricot delights sold in abundance in the city's souqs.

In Damascus, past and present mingle at every turn. In a region where a number of cities claim the title of "the world's oldest", Damascus credentials are very impressive. Josephus attributes the building of Damascus to Uz, the grandson of Noah, from whose father, Aram, the Arameans are descended. A settlement of the fourth millennium has been excavated in Tell al-Salihiye and pottery from the third millennium was unearthed in the Old City. In the Ghouta a system of irrigation canals was dug prior to the second millennium BC and were expanded by successive rulers.

In the tablets discovered at Tell al-Amarna, in Egypt, Dimashqa is mentioned as being amongst the cities conquered in the 15th Century BC by Tuthmosis III. The Arameans, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Macedonians under Alexander, the Nabateans, Rome and Byzantium all stamped their influence on this great city. Christianity was established in Damascus from the beginning of the religion -- Saul of Tarsus converted to the new faith on "the road to Damascus" -- and flourished under Byzantium. On August 20th, 636 AD the Arabs routed the Byzantine army in the battle of the Yarmouk and entered Damascus a few days after. Apart from the short period of the French Mandate, Damascus has been under Muslim rule ever since. For nearly 100 years Damascus was the political and cultural center of the Islamic world under the Omayyad Caliphate.

It was under the Caliph Walid, in 705 that the Great Omayyad Mosque was built, the 4th most important in Islam, and the most splendid and opulent building ever constructed in the Middle East.

Other conquerors followed. The Abbasids were replaced by the Seljuk Turks. Nure al-Din captured the city from its Turkoman rulers and under him and his successor Salah al-Din (Saladin of the Crusades fame) the city entered its most illustrious era. The Mongols came and went, followed by the Mameluke Sultans of Egypt, followed by Tamerlane -- who burned down half of the city after looting it and taking the best of its craftsmen captives to Samarkand. In 1516 the Ottoman Sultan Selim I, captured Damascus and for the next 400 years the city was a part of the Ottoman Empire. On October 1st, 1918 troops under General Allenby entered the city and Turkish domination came to an end. The French, who were given the UN Mandate over Syria finally left in the spring of 1946, and Damascus became the capital of the Syrian Republic.

The minimum time required to see Damascus is two days but five would be best. The sites that are a must are Souq Hamidiye, the Citadel, Nur al-Din Hospital and Museum, Madrasas Zahiriye and Adiliye, the Tomb of Salah al-Din, and the Omayyad Mosque -- a feature interesting to Christians is the South-East minaret, named Mazanet Souk, the Tower of Jesus. According to Muslim tradition Jesus will descent to earth via this tower to fight the Antichrist before the Day of Judgment. Also the Azem Palace museum and Souq Assagha (the gold market). Do not miss a visit to the Hammam al-Malik al-Zaher (Turkish style steam room, massage room, and bath). Dating from the 11th or 12th

century the baths have been completely restored and modernized. They cater only to men. It is one of the few places left in the world where men can still enjoy Arabic coffee and a narghile (water-pipe).

Annex 1

Price List of Some Hotels in Damascus (near to Cham Palace)

Name of Hotel	Telephone No.	Grade	Price of Room per Day (US\$)	Room Type	Address of Hotel
Cham Palace	+963-11-2232300	5 stars	60 \$ (with discount)	Single	Opposite to Dar Al-Mouhandisin Bldg
Omayyad Hotel	+963-11-2217700	4 stars	50 \$ (without breakfast)	Single	Fardos Ave., near Jawdat Hashimi School
Fardous Tower Hotel	+963-11-2232100	4 stars	45 \$ (without breakfast)	Single	Fardos Ave., near the Saudi Airlines
Venicia Hotel	+963-11-2316631	4 stars	56 \$ 49 \$	Double Single	Bahsa Ave., near Damascus Governorate
Damascus International Hotel	+963-11-2312400	4 stars	50 \$ (with breakfast)	Single	Bahsa Ave., near Damascus Governorate
Iwan Hotel	+963-11-2321476	3 stars	43 \$ (with breakfast)	--	Bahsa Ave.
Silver Tower Hotel	+963-11-2315433	2 stars	30 \$	Single	Bahsa Ave., at the entrance of Souq Sarouja
Alaa Tower Hotel	+963-11-2311221	2 stars	25 \$ per person	All double	Al-Thaoura St.
Alaa Tower Hotel (Branch 5)		2 stars	30 \$ (with breakfast)	--	Fardos Ave., near Jawdat Hashimi School
Peace & Love Hotel	+963-11-2316584	1 star	20 \$	--	Al-Thaoura St.

Note : These prices may increase by 20% during Summer according to the prices of tourism season.