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## **Conference of the Parties**

### **Sixteenth session**

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 2–13 December 2024

Item 2 (b) of the provisional agenda

**2018–2030 Strategic Framework of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification**

**Review of progress in the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification  
communication plan**

## **Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification communication plan**

### **Note by the secretariat**

#### *Summary*

By its decision 4/COP.15, the Conference of the Parties (COP) requested the secretariat to report on on progress made in implementing that decision.

This report presents actions taken by the secretariat for (i) the implementation of the communications plan; (ii) the yearly global observance of Desertification and Drought Day and other flagship events and campaigns; (iii) traditional and social media outreach; and (iv) publications and information dissemination.

The report also outlines the communication focus for the next biennium and includes conclusions and recommendations for consideration at the sixteenth session of the COP.



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## I. Background

1. By decision 4/COP.15, Parties requested the secretariat, subject to the availability of resources, to continue implementing the communication plan consistent with the 2018–2030 Strategic Framework of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework); ensure consistent and coherent messaging on the importance of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 15.3 and links between land, climate change and biodiversity; engage with key audiences to increase awareness about the Convention; enhance media engagement and develop partnerships to expand outreach to non-English speaking audiences; raise the profile of United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) outreach programmes and products; maximize traditional and social media outreach potential; enhance online communications tools; and build the communications capacity of the secretariat and Global Mechanism (GM).

2. This document outlines the work done on the implementation and refinement of the communication plan, highlighting various campaigns and outreach activities, including successful media outreach efforts and the yearly Desertification and Drought Day observances. It further provides background information on the ongoing outreach programmes and products, including its website and digital channels, Goodwill and Land Ambassadors, and youth engagement, including the Land Heroes campaign.

## II. Implementation of the communication plan

3. In response to Parties' requests, the secretariat has led a strategic process to align its communication plan to be consistent with the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework.

4. Specifically, the secretariat has made significant progress in increasing awareness about the objectives of the Convention through the development of key messages and narratives, enhanced use of traditional and social media, flagship outreach events and campaigns, and knowledge-sharing products.

5. Highlights of communications and outreach efforts during the reporting period include:

(a) Impactful public awareness and outreach campaigns linked to the themes of annual observances of Desertification and Drought Day, as well as key initiatives and events;

(b) Significant increase in top-tier media coverage of the Convention's activities thanks to strategic engagement with global and regional media outlets and launches of key reports and initiatives;

(c) Consistent growth of the Convention's digital presence and engagement on its social media channels;

(d) Enhanced engagement of UNCCD Goodwill and Land Ambassadors and youth champions through the Land Heroes campaign;

(e) Successful capacity-building initiatives for journalists organized on the sidelines of key events focusing on UNCCD issues and synergies among the Rio conventions;

(f) Increased multilingual communications capacity and availability of public information materials in the six United Nations languages.

6. These are described in greater detail below.

### A. Communications campaigns

7. Building on the lessons learned from recent outreach events and the strategic review of the communication plan, the secretariat and the GM have designed and implemented several outreach campaigns to increase stakeholder engagement.

8. These were closely linked to the themes selected for annual observances of Desertification and Drought Day and key programmes and initiatives such as the

International Drought Resilience Alliance (IDRA), the Group of 20 (G20) Global Land Initiative (GLI) and the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030. In addition, the secretariat continued to actively engage with the Convention on Biological Diversity and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) on outreach initiatives through the Rio Conventions Joint Liaison Group. Detailed information on the engagement with the Rio conventions is contained in document ICCD/COP(16)/4.

9. During the reporting period, the secretariat particularly focused on outreach to women and youth in recognition of these groups' critical importance for sustainable land management (SLM), as well as the specific barriers they face in accessing land and associated resources. The secretariat also stepped up its engagement with other key audiences, such as policymakers, line ministries in charge of land-based sectors, the private sector, landowners and land managers, the farmer community and pastoralists.

10. A major focus since the fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 15) was on developing consistent and coherent messaging about the Convention, the importance of SDG target 15.3, and links between land, climate change and biodiversity. For the first time, an overarching narrative in the six United Nations official languages was prepared and disseminated ahead of COP 16, setting out key issues and expectations for this landmark event.

11. The media strategy for COP 16 places a strong emphasis on targeted outreach to top-tier global and regional media outlets with the objective of securing comprehensive coverage and an in-depth presence. Media training sessions in Arabic, French and Russian took place between June and September 2024, in alignment with the three Rio conventions. The COP 16 media programme incorporates field trips for journalists to enhance coverage and promote understanding of the Convention issues.

12. Since COP 15, the secretariat has made consistent efforts to make its press releases and other public outreach materials available in all six United Nations languages. The secretariat will be working to ensure extensive multilingual coverage of COP 16, bringing the issues to a global audience. Press conferences will be held in Arabic, English and French, with other United Nations languages included whenever possible, ensuring broad accessibility and engagement.

## **B. World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought**

13. Declared by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1995, the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought (also referred to as Desertification and Drought Day) is observed every year on 17 June to promote public awareness of international efforts to combat desertification.<sup>1</sup> This report covers the Day's observance activities since the last activity reported in document ICCD/COP(15)/3, namely for the years 2022, 2023 and 2024.

### **1. 2022 Desertification and Drought Day – “Rising Up from Drought Together”<sup>2</sup>**

14. The 2022 Desertification and Drought Day's theme, “Rising Up from Drought Together”, was supported by the Droughtland campaign, which was launched at COP 15. The theme sought to mobilize political will to tackle the escalating impacts of drought and build drought resilience.

15. The global observance was hosted by the Government of Spain. In addition, 46 events to mark Desertification and Drought Day were held around the world.

16. The global observance programme was livestreamed via Facebook, Twitter (now X), YouTube and the UNCCD website. Over 160 million people have been reached through social media.

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<sup>1</sup> [General Assembly resolution 49/115](#).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unccd.int/events/desertification-drought-day/2022>.

## 2. 2023 Desertification and Drought Day – “Her Land. Her Rights.”<sup>3</sup>

17. Desertification and Drought Day 2023, themed “Her Land. Her Rights.”, focused on advancing gender equality in land restoration.

18. The global observance was hosted at the United Nations headquarters, in collaboration with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, the United Nations Development Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. High-level policymakers, scientists, and youth representatives discussed policies for women’s land rights and leadership in land management. In addition, 76 events to mark Desertification and Drought Day were held around the world.

19. The observance programme was livestreamed via Facebook, Twitter (now X), YouTube and the UNCCD website. Over 300 million people were reached through social media.

## 3. 2024 Desertification and Drought Day – “United for Land: Our Legacy. Our Future.”<sup>4</sup>

20. The 2024 Desertification and Drought Day’s theme, “United for Land: Our Legacy. Our Future.”, focused on intergenerational land stewardship and youth engagement, as well as the celebration of the UNCCD’s 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

21. A photo exhibition, educational programmes and musical performances, together with a social media campaign launched ahead of the Day, ensured the global reach of the year’s theme.

22. The global observance event at the Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany (Bundeskunsthalle) in Bonn, Germany, on 17 June 2024 also marked the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UNCCD, bringing together world leaders, youth and prominent personalities from academia, civil society and media to showcase a strong ambition to be united for land in the lead-up to COP 16.

23. The global observance was hosted by the Government of Germany. In addition, some 70 events to mark Desertification and Drought Day were held around the world.

24. The observance programme was livestreamed via Facebook, X, YouTube and the UNCCD website. Over 390 million people were reached through social media.

## C. Media outreach

25. The period under review marked a significant increase in top-tier media coverage of Convention issues and activities. This was achieved through targeted engagement with global and regional media outlets, as well as strategic launches of key reports and initiatives, notably:

(a) Global Land Outlook – Thematic Report on Rangelands and Pastoralists: Released in May 2024 during a high-level event in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, the report generated 625 news articles across 58 countries;

(b) Global Drought Snapshot 2023: Released in November 2023 on the sidelines of UNFCCC COP 28 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, the report resulted in 507 news articles across 70 countries;

(c) UNCCD Data Dashboard: Released in the lead-up to the twenty-first session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 21) in October 2023, the launch of the first-ever UNCCD Data Dashboard resulted in 620 print and online articles across all regions;

(d) Sand and Dust Storms Compendium: On the occasion of the High-Level Event on Sand and Dust Storms hosted by the Government of Uzbekistan at CRIC 21, the UNCCD

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unccd.int/events/desertification-drought-day/2023>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unccd.int/events/desertification-drought-day/2024>.

released the Sand and Dust Storms Compendium to the media, which resulted in 1,153 news articles across 85 countries.

26. The UNCCD secretariat also engaged with key journalists to facilitate field reporting on Convention issues. This has proven to be an effective approach that yielded on-message coverage in top-tier media outlets.

27. For instance, a media field visit to the Aral Sea was organized during CRIC 21 in November 2023, with the support of the Government of Uzbekistan, to enhance awareness of disaster risk reduction strategies. The experience deepened participants' understanding of the interconnected issues of water overextraction, climate change and sand and dust storms (SDS) and highlighted the critical role of land restoration in mitigating these challenges.

28. Since COP 15, UNCCD has continued to develop strategic partnerships with global media outlets, renewing its cooperation with Xinhua News Agency and working with Deutsche Welle to organize a session on links between desertification and migration at the 2024 Deutsche Welle Global Media Forum. Additional support from a professional communications and public relations agency in 2023 and 2024 to supplement the secretariat's capacity also contributed to an increase in the quality and quantity of media coverage.

29. Securing partnerships with organizations such as the Earth Negotiations Bulletin (ENB) is crucial for guaranteeing visibility and effectively reaching a diverse audience. ENB provides comprehensive coverage of UNCCD meetings through daily reports and comprehensive summary reports and analyses.

30. During the reporting period, the secretariat carried out several capacity-building programmes for journalists to expand outreach to non-English speaking audiences and achieve broader geographic reach and information dissemination.

31. In the lead up to UNFCCC COP 27, UNCCD conducted a virtual briefing for the Arabic-speaking media to highlight the links between land degradation, climate change, and disaster preparedness and risk reduction, with a specific focus on drought resilience.

32. In cooperation with UNFCCC, UNCCD organized a media training programme for seven Russian-speaking journalists from 12 to 15 June 2024 in Bonn, Germany, on the sidelines of the 60<sup>th</sup> meeting of the UNFCCC Subsidiary Bodies, focusing on the links between land and climate.

33. A media training workshop for 20 French-speaking journalists was organized by UNCCD alongside the 20<sup>th</sup> African Ministerial Conference on the Environment in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, from 2 to 6 September 2024. The workshop aimed to enhance the knowledge of francophone journalists covering Africa on desertification and SLM. Key outcomes included the provision of tailored training materials and the production of in-depth reports in the lead-up to COP 16.

34. In addition, media trainings were held for secretariat staff, including the GM and the G20 GLI, as well as for Science-Policy Interface (SPI) members, in 2024. Carried out by seasoned journalists, the trainings helped hone participants' skills as spokespeople on Convention issues and received positive feedback.

## **D. Other campaigns and initiatives**

### **1. UNCCD's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary**

35. To mark 30 years since the adoption of the Convention in 1994, the secretariat carried out a year-long campaign, which included a commemorative publication and a dedicated exhibition at the Bundeskunsthalle in collaboration with its G20 GLI (see para. 40 below).

36. Titled "Unite for Land: 30 Years of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification", the publication includes forewords by the United Nations Secretary-General and the UNCCD Executive Secretary, describes the history behind the negotiations of the Convention and its major milestones and achievements, and contains a section on looking ahead to the next 30 years, underscoring the urgent need "to accelerate action to restore at least 1 billion hectares of degraded land by 2030".

## 2. World Environment Day 2024

37. As part of its engagement with the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030, UNCCD and the United Nations Environment Programme worked closely with Saudi Arabia on conceptualizing and delivering an impactful World Environment Day 2024 ahead of COP 16, leveraging both events hosted by the country. The World Environment Day’s focus on land restoration, desertification and drought resilience under the same theme “Our Land. Our Future.” presented a unique opportunity to align and elevate the key messages and reach billions of people online and at nearly 4,000 registered events worldwide.

38. Additional information on UNCCD’s engagement with the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030 is contained in document ICCD/COP(16)/4.

## 3. International Day for Combating Sand and Dust Storms

39. The General Assembly of the United Nations designated 12 July as the International Day for Combating Sand and Dust Storms, which was first observed in 2023. Along with members of the United Nations Coalition, the secretariat launched the Sand and Dust Storms Toolbox (SDS Toolbox), which provides tools, guidance and information which can be used to identify the sources of SDS, develop and implement management policy, plans and strategies, assess risks and vulnerabilities to SDS, understand how to observe, monitor, forecast and provide warnings for SDS and develop and implement ways to mitigate the impacts of SDS. Additional information on the engagement with the SDS Coalition is contained in document ICCD/COP(16)/16.

## 4. Group of 20 Global Land Initiative

40. During the reporting period, UNCCD and the G20 GLI collaborated on developing products and activities to communicate the benefits and positive impacts of achieving land degradation neutrality (LDN) and reach new actors. Below are some highlights:

(a) LDN commitments and achievements were showcased through the G20 GLI Global Restoration Information Hub and the 2024 Annual Report of the G20 GLI;

(b) A communications workshop was organized in 2023 to develop a joint strategic approach to communicate land restoration. The workshop participants included communication specialists from the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention), the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies and the Global Landscapes Forum;

(c) UNCCD and G20 GLI provided Bundeskunsthalle with guidance, including scientific advice, in designing the Save Land Exhibition, which runs from December 2024 to June 2025;

(d) UNCCD and G20 GLI amplify each other’s messages during key moments, including G20 meetings in 2023 (India) and 2024 (Brazil).

41. Additional information on G20 GLI is contained in document ICCD/COP(16)/4.

## 5. International Drought Resilience Alliance

42. The secretariat supported strategic communications and outreach in the lead-up to and following the launch of the IDRA at the UNFCCC COP 27 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, in November 2022.

43. Dedicated IDRA branding and a visual identity were developed, and a website<sup>5</sup> was launched in 2023 and subsequently revamped in 2024, featuring highlights from across the IDRA membership.

44. As host of IDRA secretariat since March 2023, UNCCD also supported the development of key messages, audiovisual materials, a quarterly newsletter and media outreach, including thought leadership pieces, media training, and on-the-ground reporting

<sup>5</sup> <https://idralliance.global/>.

by journalists from top-tier media outlets in Central Asia, Europe and Latin America. The secretariat also communicated on IDRA-related events and released key reports (e.g. Investing in Resilience) at international conferences on water and climate.

45. The launch of the Global Drought Snapshot was timed to coincide with the first anniversary of IDRA at UNFCCC COP 28 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, in December 2023. New countries joining IDRA have been announced via press releases.

46. Additional information on IDRA is contained in document ICCD/COP(16)/4.

## **6. Land for Life programme**

47. The Land for Life programme engaged in various awareness-raising and knowledge support activities to educate the public and policymakers on the importance of achieving LDN and the benefits of implementing SLM practices.

48. The Land for Life Award was launched at COP 10 in 2011 in the Republic of Korea as part of the Changwon Initiative. The Award recognizes individuals and organizations advocating and promoting land-use practices, known as SLM techniques, with significant and positive impacts on people, communities and society. The Land for Life Award and its Kubuqi Special Award have had 18 winners to date.

49. In 2023–2024, a comprehensive evaluation of the Land for Life programme was carried out by the secretariat. The evaluation included interviews with a diverse range of stakeholders, encompassing programme beneficiaries, UNCCD staff, Land Heroes and Ambassadors, as well as external partners and experts in the field of SLM.

50. The evaluation concluded that despite funding and human resources constraints, the programme had a positive impact, particularly regarding the engagement of high-profile personalities such as UNCCD Goodwill and Land Ambassadors, and youth champions as Land Heroes, which has significant potential. It was also noted that strategic and sustained investment will be required for the continuation of the Land for Life Award.

## **7. UNCCD Goodwill and Land Ambassadors**

51. UNCCD Goodwill and Land Ambassadors were actively engaged throughout the reporting period at various UNCCD events, notably the global observances of Desertification and Drought Day and through UNCCD’s public outreach and advocacy campaigns.

52. In 2023, Ricky Kej, Baaba Maal and Inna Modja were formally appointed as UNCCD Goodwill Ambassadors. They had previously served as UNCCD Land Ambassadors. As Goodwill Ambassadors, they will act as honorary spokespeople playing a crucial role in raising awareness and advocating for the objectives of the Convention with youth, women, children and affected communities.

53. Current UNCCD Land Ambassadors are former President of Finland Tarja Halonen and distinguished Korean diplomat, lawyer and academic Byong Hyon Kwon.

54. In 2023, the UNCCD’s campaign #HerLand, championed by the Goodwill and Land Ambassadors, significantly raised awareness of gender disparities in land management. They played a pivotal role in producing impactful outcomes: mobilizing women leaders in support of the “Her Land. Her Rights.” call to action led by former President Tarja Halonen, the song “Her Land”, produced by Ricky Kej and performed together with Baaba Maal and Inna Modja during Desertification and Drought Day 2023, and an innovative #HerLand virtual exhibition and documentary illustrating the challenges and contributions of women in land management, created by Inna Modja.

## **8. Land Heroes**

55. In 2020, the secretariat launched a campaign to nominate UNCCD Land Heroes to identify young people that would help the Convention to convey the message of the importance of land through concrete actions. Between 2020 and 2024, the Land Heroes supported the efforts made by the secretariat and the Parties in raising the visibility of the Convention as a tool to address the challenges faced by young people in protecting and restoring their land. Their presence in official meetings of the UNCCD, the Rio conventions



as well as other key events was extremely important to ensure the inclusion of voices from the young and future generations in raising awareness of the importance of land. The UNCCD Land Heroes also organized campaigns, published articles, implemented projects on the ground, inspired and mobilized youth to promote UNCCD key objectives, and supported the work undertaken by the UNCCD community. By sharing their achievements, they inspired change, uniting their peers, providing mentorship and proving the transformative power of collective action.

56. Building on the successes of the inaugural 2020 cohort, at the end of 2023 the UNCCD secretariat launched the call for the selection of a second cohort of Land Heroes. The campaign was launched to recognize and support young individuals and youth organizations who were making a positive impact against desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD). The campaign aimed to engage youth aged 18–35 as the agents of change for SLM and the implementation of the Convention. In total, 810 young people from 102 countries submitted their nominations to become the next Land Hero. After a selection process with the participation of representatives of the Youth Caucus, young leaders, youth-led and youth-based organizations, and secretariat staff, 10 new Land Heroes<sup>6</sup> were selected and announced during the global observance of Desertification and Drought Day in Bonn. These young changemakers from around the world are working to restore land, boost resilience to drought, develop sustainable agricultural businesses, and harness technology and innovation to tackle global environmental challenges.

57. The G20 GLI and the International Trade Centre launched the Ye! Youth Ecopreneur Programme 2024. The programme was conceived as a comprehensive one-year programme to empower 100 young ecopreneurs who are venturing into land-related businesses. The programme aimed at providing the innovators with training, mentorship and coaching needed to position them for success in their entrepreneurial journey.

## E. Other outreach products

### 1. Website and online communications

58. UNCCD increased its outreach through online communications during the biennium as a key channel for raising awareness about Convention issues and impact. In addition to unccd.int, new dedicated websites were developed for specific campaigns and platforms.

59. UNCCD’s social media following has experienced a significant increase, as evidenced in the table below.

Table  
UNCCD social media audience growth between January 2022 and July 2024

<i>Platform</i>	<i>January 2022</i>	<i>July 2024</i>	<i>% increase</i>
X (formerly Twitter) followers	42,500	73,400	73%
Facebook likes	33,145	38,375	16%
Instagram followers	11,200	27,400	145%
LinkedIn followers	21,686	33,360	54 %

### 2. Publications and information dissemination

60. The number of new publications posted on the website since June 2022 is 56. Among the most downloaded publications are the Global Land Outlook (second edition), the Global Drought Snapshot and the Sand and Dust Storms Compendium. The e-library catalogue is continuously updated with up to 100 new entries each month.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.unccd.int/land-and-life/youth/land-heroes>.

61. The UNCCD News Alert continued to be sent out regularly to over 33,000 subscribers, and website resources have been consistently updated with new online content and thematic pages.

62. In addition, the secretariat produced a brochure, *United for Land*, containing essential information about the Convention in seven languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Russian and Spanish), in line with its refreshed branding and messaging.

63. During the reporting period, the secretariat continued to actively share through its communication channels and interactions the products of the SPI and other relevant science-based information, and translate that information, when needed, into clear and short briefings and messages that can be easily used for informing political decision-makers and the general public. Among such products were the updated Drought Toolbox and SDS Toolbox, as well as short video animations about SPI reports.

### **III. Focus for 2025–2026**

64. All activities under the communication plan are designed to assist UNCCD Parties and stakeholders in implementing the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework in its entirety and fulfilling their ambitions for the achievement of LDN and drought resilience. This will remain the primary goal of the implementation of the plan during the next biennium. The secretariat will also take into account the recommendations of the Intergovernmental Working Group to Oversee the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework Midterm Evaluation Process regarding the Convention’s future communications strategy.

65. Consistent with the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework and building on communications work to date, as well as ongoing and planned outreach programmes and campaigns, the focus in the next biennium will be on:

(a) Aligning UNCCD Parties and stakeholders around a consistent and inspiring narrative on the importance of SLM, its contribution to addressing the interconnected challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss, and its central and catalytic role for the achievement of the SDGs;

(b) Developing and implementing impactful campaigns that highlight successes by UNCCD Parties and stakeholders in the implementation of the Convention, including at-scale land restoration and drought resilience initiatives; underscore the urgency of addressing DLDD as well as the environmental, human and economic costs of inaction; and position LDN as a critical yet achievable objective in the context of the SDGs;

(c) Leveraging key opportunities to place land issues high on the global agenda and reach new audiences, with particular focus on leading the annual observance of Desertification and Drought Day; further increasing the impact of outreach programmes; as well as actively contributing to the implementation of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030) and the United Nations Decade on Combating Sand and Dust Storms 2025–2034;

(d) Strengthening partnerships and capacity for raising visibility of land issues and positioning UNCCD as a go-to authoritative source of information on these issues with media and other key stakeholders, with special attention paid to providing high-quality, science-based information in relevant formats, channels and languages. For this, scientific and technical data, information and policy recommendations from the SPI, the Global Land Outlook and other major scientific assessments will be fully employed;

(e) Mobilizing new and influential voices in support of the Convention’s objectives and related advocacy and communications activities, for example the UNCCD Goodwill and Land Ambassadors and Land Heroes, and leaders from government, business and civil society, with a particular emphasis on engaging youth, women and girls from communities affected by DLDD.

#### **IV. Conclusions and recommendations**

**66. Parties may wish to note this document in the COP 16 report with a request to the secretariat to provide an update on the implementation of the communications plan at future sessions of the COP as part of its report on the implementation of the workplan of the Convention.**

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