

UNCCD is born 1992-1994



Rio and the UNCCD convention process

1992-1994

The Earth Summit, in Chapter 12 of Agenda 21, called on the UN General Assembly to set up an intergovernmental committee to prepare for a legally binding instrument that addresses the problem of desertification, which was confirmed by the 47th Session of the General Assembly in December 1992 in New York through resolution 47/188.

Desertification, along with climate change and the loss of biodiversity, were identified as the greatest challenges to sustainable development during the 1992 Rio Earth Summit.

Established in 1994, UNCCD is **the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management.**

The final text has been forwarded to the Office of Legal Affairs of the United Nations, which acts as Depository, in order to prepare for the signing ceremony to be held in Paris, on 14-15 October 1994. <http://www.un-documents.net/a-ac241-27.pdf>

The drafting process of UNCCD was thus part and parcel of UNCED's official follow up process, and was charged to an inter-governmental panel (INCD).

The INCD convened ten times altogether. At session one (INCD-1, 24 May to 3 June 1993, Nairobi) the delegates exchanged existing information and background knowledge on major problems to be tackled by the convention. They also discussed the principal goals of UNCCD, highlighting the particular emphasis on Africa for the first time.

The following three sessions were dedicated to the elaboration of a draft convention and regional implementation annexes. An important issue was the partnership between North and South and South and South.

At INCD-5, taking place from 6 to 17 June 1994 in Paris, the final draft of UNCCD including four regional implementation annexes passed. Five further INCD sessions were organized to prepare for the first session of the Conference of the Parties (COP).

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa (UNCCD) **was adopted on 17 June 1994 and opened for signature at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, France from October 1994 to October 1995, during which period it received 115 signatures.**

The signature ceremony took place from 14 to 15 October 1994 in Paris, and 85 states signed UNCCD at this occasion, and became the first Parties to the Convention. June 17 became the World Day to Combat Desertification.

The UN General Assembly welcomed this new convention and its signatory process through resolution 49/234, adopted on 23 December 1994.

1996 - 2000

UNCCD entered into force on 26 December 1996, 90 days after the 50th instrument of ratification was deposited.

For a party acceding the Convention after this date the Convention enters into force 90 days after this party has deposited its instrument of ratification, accession or acceptance. To date, it has been signed and ratified by more than 190 states. Developing countries as well as developed countries, including such countries not affected by drought or desertification are Parties to the Convention. This mode follows the principle of international partnership.

In October 1997, the first session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 1) was organized in Rome, Italy. Rules governing the COP and its subsidiary bodies were established, the functions of the Global Mechanism, the financial mechanism of UNCCD was set forth, and the permanent secretariat of the Convention (UNCCD Secretariat) was designated.

COP 2, taking place in December 1998 in Senegal, Dakar, concentrated on medium-term strategies of the secretariat. A declaration on the convocation of the first round table of Members of Parliaments on desertification was decided upon.

In January 1999, the Permanent Secretariat of the UNCCD was established in Bonn, Germany - after having served as an interim secretariat based in Geneva.

COP 3, which convened in November 1999 in Recife, Brazil, brought forth a first review of policies, operational modalities and activities of the Global Mechanism as finance broking institution. Consultations took place on the "Recife Initiative" to enhance the implementation of the obligations of the Parties to UNCCD.

In December 2000, COP 4 in Bonn, Germany established a fifth implementation annex for Central and Eastern Europe (Annex V), and adopted the "Recife Initiative." An inter-governmental ad-hoc working group (AHWG) started an in-depth review of country reports on the implementation of the Convention in March and April 2001 at an intersessional meeting in Bonn, Germany.

A comprehensive report, including conclusions and recommendations on further steps in the implementation of the Convention, was adopted and submitted to COP 5 in October 2001 in Geneva, Switzerland.

The years after and especially the Rio process in 1992 brought a new light in the process and this phenomenon was recognized as a process leading to widespread deterioration of ecosystems and people's life. The Earth Summit, in Chapter 12 of Agenda 21, called on the UN General Assembly to set up an inter-governmental committee to prepare for a legally binding instrument that addresses the problem of desertification, which was confirmed by the 47th Session of the General Assembly in December 1992 in New York through resolution 47/188. The drafting process of UNCCD was thus part and parcel of UNCED as official follow up process, and was charged to an inter-governmental panel (INCD).

One of the chief drafters of UNCCD, Ambassador Robert Ryan, on the scientific context of UNCCD, but also revealing other crucial aspects, stated:

„Ambassador Bo Kjellén well describes the important role that the international scientific community played in the negotiation of the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD). In this connection, two points bear repeating here as background to discussing scientific challenges in CCD implementation. At its first substantive session in 1993, the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for Desertification (INCD) spent a week exchanging scientific information. This was crucial to developing a broad consensus on the integrated, bottom-up approach that the CCD would take to sustainable development in drylands. The International Panel of Experts on Desertification (IPED), which had broad geographic and disciplinary representation, directly assisted the Secretariat and potential parties in fleshing out this overall approach throughout the CCD and its regional implementation annexes. The IPED's imprint is particularly evident in the definitions in article 1 and in the articles on information collection, analysis and exchange; on research and development; on transfer, acquisition, adaptation and development of technology; and on capacity building.(Source: SWP-Berlin The conceptual matrix of the UNCCD /page 14 January 2005)

[The Saga of the Convention to Combat Desertification: The Rio/Johannesburg Process and the Global Responsibility for the Drylands](#)

(Ambassador Bo Kjellen shares his thoughts from the negotiation process)

An excerpt: “As Prep com negotiations started again in New York in March 1992, there was a much better atmosphere in the room. The African countries had managed to agree on a proposal for a redrafting of Chapter 12, and when the US representative in the Working Group stated that the USA could work on that basis and other industrialized countries fell in line, I felt very relieved, since the pressure on the negotiations was by now quite extreme. At the same time, this African initiative heralded an African commitment to the dryland issues, which has prevailed to this day. I have continuously been impressed by the competence and the energy which so many African negotiators displayed during these long years of negotiation. Without it, I do not think that we would ever have been able to work out the Convention, because in fact the prospects seemed initially rather dim: sometimes we felt that it was a very limited group of people who really believed in the project.

***Most important of those people was – and is – no doubt Arba Diallo.** I have been privileged to work with him during the whole period of negotiation, and I have always admired his clear analysis, his unswerving loyalty to the process and to the people in the drylands, as well as his never faltering optimism. At first sight it might seem that there would be limited*

prospects for good understanding between a former Foreign Minister of Burkina Faso, born in the small town of Dori close to the desert, and a much older diplomat and bureaucrat from the cold and wet shores of the Baltic. But it worked, and I feel proud to have Arba Diallo as my friend."

Long time ago and may be not so long, 25 years only fighting against desertification. A special phenomena, intensive process with scientific efforts and, research and, political will in order to have the Convention to Combat Desertification work and support the efforts of millions of people around the world suffering from it.

You will see some handwritten comments and notes from the negotiation process on the 15 floor exhibition area, documents, photos and testimonials from staff members who were in the process from the very beginning. We would like also to point out again the role of the desertification pioneers during those years Mr. Hama Arba Diallo (UNCCD first Executive secretary), Maurice Strong, Mostafa Tolba, Mohammed Kassas, Bo Kjellen and many known and unknown people.

Come and visit our monthly exhibitions on the 15 floor. Read further from our special [webpage](#) with interviews/press conference videos from 1994.

Prepared by UNCCD LIBRARY