



- MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COP 15 BUREAU (1 MARCH 2023) -

The second intersessional COP 15 Bureau meeting took place in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire on 1 March 2023. Opening remarks were provided by the COP 15 President, Mr. Alain Richard Donwahi, and UNCCD Executive Secretary Mr. Ibrahim Thiaw.

An overview of matters discussed, and decisions taken by the Bureau are presented below.

I. Adoption of the Agenda

The agenda was adopted without modification.

II. Status of Organisation of CRIC 21

a. Organizational process

The secretariat introduced the agenda item and provided updates on the organizational process for the twenty first session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 21). A first planning mission went to Uzbekistan from 3 to 7 October 2022 to assess the situation and initiate consultations with the host country to ensure a successful organization of CRIC 21. The main purpose of this first planning mission was to ascertain the date and venue of CRIC 21.

Following assessment of venues both in Tashkent and Samarkand and further consultations with the host country, it was jointly decided that CRIC 21 will be held in Samarkand from 09 to 13 October 2023.

A second planning mission is foreseen to take place end of March 2023 in Samarkand to move forward in the CRIC 21 Preparation.

A bureau member thanked the secretariat for the updates and raised the issue of the maximization of the Science and Technology Correspondent (STC) participation at the COP and CRIC sessions. The same bureau member requested clarification on the information document item 2.b on the appointment of the rapporteur of the CRIC.

The secretariat informed that that the issue of the STC participation will be addressed under item V of the agenda.

b. Substantive process

The CRIC Chair reported on the outcomes of the CRIC Bureau meeting held on the 15th December 2022 which reviewed the CRIC 21 draft agenda, comprising agenda items that includes : (1) aspects related to organizational matters (the adoption of the agenda and schedule of work; and the appointment of the Rapporteur of the Committee); (2) Assessment of Implementation; (3) Strategic objectives 1 to 4; (3) Financial flow; (4) Strategic objective 5; (5) Implementation of voluntary land degradation neutrality targets and related implementation efforts ; (6) Interim report of the intergovernmental working group on effective policy and implementation measures for addressing drought under the UNCCD;



(7) Improving the procedures for communication as well as the quality and formats of reports to be submitted to the Conference of the Parties; (8) Policy frameworks and thematic topics: Drought, Gender, Sand and Dust Storms, Land tenure and (9) adoption of the report of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention to the Conference of the Parties;

The Chair further mentioned that in relation to the 2022 UNCCD reporting process, the first reporting deadline for data on Strategic Objective 1 (SO 1) had passed and 115 submissions were recorded in the PRAIS 4 system at the time of the meeting. Some Parties prior to the submission date had indicated difficulties in uploading data to the PRAIS and the international consultants and the reporting team were working on getting those submissions integrated into the database.

On the official documentation for CRIC it was reported that that around 12 pre-session documents will be drafted and circulated prior to the session and will be submitted in accordance with the deadline that requires all documentation to be available online in all United Nations languages.

The CRIC Chair also informed the bureau on the new appointment of the vice chairs for the Western European and Others group: Ms. Dutailly Philippines from France and from Latin American and the Caribbean group; Ms. Christina Rodriguez from Peru. The CRIC Chair further clarified that that Ms. Philippines had also been selected as rapporteur of the CRIC by the Bureau. It is expected that Ms. Philippines will be appointed as rapporteur for CRIC during the CRIC 21 session.

A bureau member raised an issue on delays experienced in disbursement of enabling funds made available by UNEP to eligible countries.

Another bureau member congratulated the CRIC Chair for the presentation and also expressed concerns on the long process faced by countries for receiving the funds provided by the United Nations Environment Programme through the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

Another bureau member thanked the secretariat and the COP 15 Presidency for all the efforts in organizing the bureau meeting and asked his peers to support the CRIC 21 proposal to add an additional agenda item on the IWG MTE. The same bureau member raised concern on the technical challenges that parties are facing now in finalizing the submission of their National reports on the PRAIS system. The Bureau member requested to grant 15 additional days to allow Parties to submit effectively their reports through the PRAIS system. The bureau member finally enquired about the time at which the secretariat will make the CRIC 21 documentation available.

The CRIC chair clarified that consultations had taken place between the CRIC Chair and the funding (GEF) and implementing agency (UNEP) to expedite the funds disbursement process, while also reaching out to Parties urging them to submit their necessary documents for fund disbursement in a timely manner. The Chair reported that Regional Liaison officer (RLOs) were also actively engaged to reach out to Parties to also encourage them to prepare and submit their documentation in due time.

The Chair further informed that the question of the IWG MTE had also been discussed during the last CRIC bureau meeting, and given the very busy schedule of the CRIC 21 session, the CRIC Bureau proposal would be for the IWG Chair to provide an status update on the work of the IWG MTE during one of the CRIC plenary meetings while the with participatory consultations on the outcomes of the independent evaluation would be organized at a later stage after the CRIC.



Further to the CRIC Chair responses provided, two bureau members, stressed once again the need to include the IWG MTE in the CRIC agenda rather than deferring it to after the CRIC 21 session. .

Further to these feedbacks, the CRIC Chair made a second proposal to have the IWG MTE session at the last day of the CRIC 21 and invited Bureau members to agree on the most suitable scenario.

Following some further exchanges on this issue, the Executive Secretary finally proposed that the issue be discussed at the next CRIC bureau meeting and for the CRIC bureau to revert back to the COP Bureau with a workable scenario. .

III. Report by the Chair of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST)

The CST Chair presented the agenda item and informed that the Bureau of the Committee on the Science and Technology (CST) convened its third intersessional meeting virtually on 8 November 2022. In addition, the renewed Science Policy Interface (SPI) met for the first time in the new triennium for the 16th Meeting of the SPI which took place from 13-15 December 2022. Furthermore, in collaboration with the Bureau of the Committee on Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC), an in-person CST-CRIC joint Bureaux Meeting was convened on 15 December 2022 in Bonn.

The key issues discussed included a) recommendations for further improving the SPI work, b) science communication pathways of the UNCCD, c) the 16th SPI Meeting outcomes, and d) proposed options for maximizing the participation of Science and Technology Correspondents (STCs) in the sessions of the two UNCCD subsidiary bodies.

The 16th SPI meeting on 13-15 December 2022 completed with the following key outcomes: a) the renewed SPI were introduced to the Terms of Reference and associated governance documents, the working modalities of the SPI, and the substance of the SPI work programme as mandated in decision 18/COP.15; b) establishment of the SPI working groups; c) drafting of the outlines and components of the respective technical reports; d) tentative timelines banded with indicative milestones relevant to the two thematic objective scientific assessments.

The CST-CRIC joint bureaux meeting held on 16 December 2023 discussed on the COP15 decisions 11 and 21/COP.15 on maximizing participation of the Science and Technology Correspondents (STCs) at future sessions of the Conference of the Parties, including sessions of CST and CRIC and regional meetings. A common understanding to bring the issue at the COP 15 Bureau meeting for guidance were reached on :

- the proposed options on scheduling the CRIC and CST sessions during the COP16 including information about any additional financial implications related to participation of eligible STCs, and
- financial implications on convening intersessional CST sessions back-to-back to the CRIC (as per dec.12/COP8) subject to the adoption of a decision at COP16 in this respect.

The CST Chair finally informed that the 17th Meeting of the SPI will be organized for 2-4 May 2023 followed by the CST Bureau Meeting on 5 May 2023 both in Bonn.



A Bureau member thanked the CST Chair for his presentation and recalled the key role that the STCs play in the UNCCD process and stressed the need of maximizing their participation in the entire COP 16 .

IV. Intersessional process

a. Intergovernmental working group on midterm evaluation

The secretariat presented the agenda item by recalling that, as per COP 15 decision, the purpose of the midterm evaluation is to assess the progress made in implementing the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework and achieving its five strategic objectives. The evaluation will be built on the standard evaluation criteria of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which comprise relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability.

The key components of the midterm evaluation are: (1) an intergovernmental working group (IWG-MTE) to oversee the process; (2) an independent external assessment managed by the secretariat ; (3) participatory consultations to provide feedback on the recommendations of the independent external assessment and (4) a final report of the IWG-MTE for submission to COP 16.

The IWG-MTE held its first meeting from 13 to 15 February 2023 in Bonn, Germany with the aim to set the basis for the midterm evaluation and to consider the programme of work of the IWG-MTE.

In the coming weeks, the IWG MTE members and observers will provide further feedback to the preparation of the independent assessment. By the end of March, the planning of the assessment will be completed and the team of evaluators will start the data collection. This will include study of relevant documentation, surveys for different UNCCD stakeholder groups (focal points, science correspondents, civil society...) and targeted interviews.

The team of evaluators are expected to share with the IWG-MTE a draft summary of their main findings around mid-June 2023. This summary will be discussed in an online meeting of the group before the end of June 2023.

Next in-person meeting of the IWG-MTE will be held immediately after the CRIC session in October 2023. That meeting will start with the consideration of the report of the group, building on the independent assessment.

The secretariat concluded by informing the bureau that a short summary of the status of the midterm evaluation process is being prepared. It will be translated to French, Russian and Spanish and made available to all interested, as a tool for enhancing information-sharing on the process.

A Bureau member thanked the secretariat for the presentation and requested the independent assessment team to include in its data collection a question on the use by the countries of their respective national report. The secretariat will revert to the members of the IWG MTE group on the proposal and getting their feedback.



The secretariat informed that, on the point related to the work of the two IWGs it will ensure information exchanges and coherence between the work of the two groups.

Another bureau member recalled the proposal to hold at later stage the participatory consultations on the independent assessment recommendations rather than during the CRIC session itself. An announcement on the IWG MTE can be done at CRIC21 however, the consultations/discussions can be done or in the margins of CRIC21 or at a later stage (online) at the end of CRIC21 .

The secretariat underlined that given the time frame and deadlines imposed by the UN rules and regulations regarding the processing of official documents, the CRIC21 agenda will need to be finalized and submitted to United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) by June 2023 .Accordingly ,the proposal of the CRIC Bureau on the agenda item related to IWG MTE will need to be formulated before that, in order to be submitted and cleared by the COP Bureau.

The secretariat will ensure that the recommendation of the CRIC bureau will be circulated by email to the COP Bureau members for final decision on the matter.

b. Intergovernmental Working Group on Drought

The secretariat presented the agenda item by informing the Bureau on the first meeting of the IWG that took place from 29 to 30 November in Bonn. In their first meeting, the IWG elected two co-chairs . The group deliberated on their working modalities, a calendar of major milestones/meetings and the need for interaction with other processes within and outside the UNCCD.

The next meeting of the IWG is set to take place on 13 - 14 March 2023, in Yerevan, Armenia.

As part of the preparations for the meeting, the Secretariat received submissions from IWG members on the various options, including global policy instruments and regional policy frameworks to effectively manage drought under the Convention. Based on submissions and some further research as mandated by the Group during its meeting, the secretariat is currently developing a concept paper on Policy Options and Legal Modalities for drought management and the pros and cons of the options with some criteria for the selection.

The secretariat further informed on some changes in the membership within the group:

- The resignation of the Hungary representative. Further consultations within the region, Spain came forward with a new representative in replacement of Hungary for the Annex IV .
- The resignation of the representative of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) for the international organizations. The secretariat requested guidance from the bureau members on her successor .

A bureau member thanked the secretariat for the presentation, and proposed to request a new representative from the same organisation , preferably a women for gender balance as per COP guidance . The bureau member further proposed , alternatively , the representative from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) .



V. Status of Organisation of COP 16

The secretariat presented the two sub-items.

a. Organizational process

By decision 34/COP15, the COP accepted with gratitude the generous offer of the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to host the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP16) and to meet the additional costs and decided that the COP16 shall be held in Saudi Arabia in 2024. In line with the above mandates, consultations between the UNCCD secretariat and the Government of Saudi Arabia followed, through which all relevant legal, financial, logistical and technical documentation on COP requirements were communicated, including a draft Host Country Agreement.. At the invitation of the Government of Saudi Arabia, a joint UN team headed by the UNCCD secretariat, will organize a first planning mission early 2023 and visit the proposed venue for the Conference in Riyadh (tentative dates for the planning mission are still to be confirmed).

The secretariat further informed the bureau on the Executive Secretary visit to Riyadh on 13-14 February 2023. On that occasion consultations were held with His Excellency the Minister of Environment, water and Agriculture of Saudi Arabia and high-level officials , on several substantive aspects of the COP, including format, date and agenda of the high-level segment (HLS) as well as early planning measures required on both sides for a successful organization of the COP. Initial consultations indicate that the host country would favour the organization of the High Level Segment, including a Heads of States' Summit, during the first week and immediately following the formal opening of the COP.

b. Tentative schedule of work including follow-up to decision 11/COP15 and 21/COP15

Two scenarios for the overall COP16 schedule of work were presented to the COP Bureau aiming to maximize the CST participation in the work of the CST and CRIC.

The first scenario considers the organization of the High-Level Segment (HLS) at the start of the COP16. Under such scenario COP16 will open in the morning session of the first day and the High-level round tables (RTs) and interactive dialogues (IDs) will follow in the afternoon The second day of the COP will be dedicated to the Heads of State Summit (HoS).

The second scenario of the COP16 draft schedule of work considers the HLS organization during the 2nd week of COP16. Within such scenario, the number of CST meetings organized during the first week can be between four to seven. Furthermore, under such scenario, the number of CRIC meetings could be increased up to a maximum of three meetings during the 1st COP16 week.

From a practical point of view, both scenarios could be implemented while contributing at maximizing the STCs participation in the work of the CRIC, and enabling, at the same time, the CST to finalize its work during the first week. It is however to be noted that the proposed meetings need be confirmed in-session with the UN conference service counterpart, so as to ensure the required interpretation services in all UN languages. Current UNCCD interpretation entitlements for a COP session are for two meetings in parallel in the morning and two meetings in the afternoon. No other official subsidiary bodies' meetings can take place in parallel with a COP meeting.



Finally, it is to be further noted that the tentative COP16 schedule of work to be enclosed to the provisional annotated COP16 agenda will be considered and finally agreed by the President of COP15 and in the case of the format and duration of the HLS, in consultation with the COP16 Host country. The English advance copy of the provisional agenda will be made available to Parties in line with the documentation submission deadlines by 09 September 2024.

A bureau member thanked the secretariat for the presentation and reiterated the willingness of his country to push forward COP16 agenda and remain available for the support needed in COP16 preparation. The bureau member further added that the COP16 date and venue will soon be officially confirmed and the preparation of the first planning mission is ongoing.

Another bureau member proposed to send the invitation of the Heads of States (HoS) summit well in advance to allow them to plan accordingly. The same bureau member further proposed to have the HLS at the second week so that high level participants could put forward any political resolution on the ongoing discussions.

Another bureau member added that both scenarios presented by the Secretariat have precedents in practice and serve different purposes. The bureau member further suggested to respect the preference of the host country for an HLS at the first week.

Another bureau member requested to have the documents available if possible 12 weeks in advance, and further support the proposal of having the HLS at the beginning of the second week. This will facilitate the negotiation process and allow more time to understand different positions and to find possible compromises.

Another bureau member added that, with the HLS at the second week, the High levels participants will have opportunity to be briefed on the issues of negotiations and also be given a clear role in trying to unlock any issues that is required.

A bureau member, informed that both options were fine with its group, they are only requesting not to reduce the CST session as made in proposal option 1.

The Executive Secretary also underlined the commitment of the Government of Saudi Arabia and its engagement for a successful organization of COP16. He further asked the bureau to consider the proposal put forwards by the Host Country . The Executive Secretary clarified that the additional session of the CST will carry financial implication, and discussion will continue to explore adding one more CST session.

VI. Other Business

a. Cyber security

The secretariat presented this agenda item as an information to the bureau members on the attack with malicious intent of the UNCCD IT system last January 2023 .

The secretariat was alerted that letters, including requests for payment with a changed account number, were made on behalf of UNCCD from one of the staff member. An invoice with a new bank account was given and the donor made multiple payments over the past three weeks.



The management team immediately decided to contact all the Parties to the convention and inform them that (a) there is an ongoing cyber security incident in UNCCD, (b) UNCCD has not changed our account number and (c) no payment should be made to any account till further notice. This was done through Regional Liaison Officers.

UN Information and Computing Center (UNICC) at Valencia was contacted to review the incident. Based on their advice, additional controls has been put in place. As of Feb. 1 the UNICC considered this case as being closed to their side.

A long term strategy including additional cyber security measure staff training and invoicing plan is being made.

The Executive Secretary seized the opportunity to thank all the bureau members for their collaboration and their guidance along this process .

b. President's proposal of agenda for the visits of the five UNCCD annexes

The COP15 President shared a proposal of visit, of the five UNCCD annexes in order to strengthen political and financial advocacy, that includes:

- Annex IV : Northern Mediterranean (Turkey, Israel, Greece, Spain, Portugal) in March – April 2023 ;
- Annex I: Africa (Kenya, Morocco, DRC, Namibia) in May-June 2023 ;
- Annex III: Latin America and the Caribbean (Argentina, Mexico, Chile, Brazil, Dominique, Panama) in July.

The COP 15 President office will coordinate with the COP 15 Bureau members for the effective preparation of these visits.

A bureau member thanked the President for this proposal and promised to push forward this visit of their region to be well prepared and eventually include an invitation to one of their region working group meeting.

The Executive Secretary welcomed and fully supported the COP15 President initiative.

A bureau member raised the issue related to the budget and requested the secretariat to ensure that the bureau members are fully aware of the expenditures in particular for the G20 and the International Drought Resilience Alliance (IDRA) initiatives .the bureau member further requested that the Bureau members are briefed at the next meeting on these activities (G20, IDRA) that are substantially taking part in the UNCCD process and further budget matters.

The Executive Secretary conform the secretariat's availability to provide an analysis review on budget matters during CRIC21 session. On ,both, IDRA and G20 initiatives, the Executive Secretary stressed that the secretariat is very privileged to dispose of this two important initiatives that provide unique platforms to help elevating politically the debate on land issues.



The Executive Secretary concluded in thanking and congratulating the COP 15 President, all the COP15 Bureau members, and the secretariat staff for the work and the successful organization of this meeting.

VI. Next Meeting

A next bureau meeting is foreseen during the last quarter of 2023, to be held at the UNCCD headquarter.