



- MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COP 15 BUREAU (13 NOVEMBER 2023) -

The third intersessional COP 15 Bureau meeting took place in Samarkand, Uzbekistan on 13 November 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. Report by the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) Chair

The CRIC Chair reported that since the last COP 15 Bureau meeting held in March 2023 in Abidjan, three online meetings of the CRIC Bureau were organized, in May, July and September 2023.

The meetings were dedicated to various topics, but mainly focusing on the organization of the CRIC 21 session, with special attention given to the High Level segment on Sand and Dust Storms and participatory consultations on midterm evaluation of UNCCD Strategic framework 2018-2030, and the most efficient way to include it within the CRIC agenda, as those activities were to be organized for the first time during the CRIC session.

The Chair also reported that according to the established plan, regional consultations of affected country Parties of the Convention's regional implementation annexes for Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Northern Mediterranean and Central and Eastern Europe, in preparation for CRIC 21 were convened prior to the session i.e. 12 November in Samarkand, with an aim to finalize discussions and to prepare regional statements for the plenary.

In line with the CRIC mandate, the main focus of the CRIC 21 session will be devoted to the analysis of information prepared on the basis of data submitted by Parties in their national reports.

With regard to the reporting deadline, the CRIC Chair pointed out that as of 28 February 2023, a total of 126 national reports had been submitted. The PRAIS 4 platform was used in the 2022 UNCCD reporting process and there were 485 active users registered on PRAIS 4 during the 2022 UNCCD reporting process.

Referring to participatory consultations on the midterm evaluation of UNCCD Strategic framework 2018-2030, and following an intensive discussion, it was agreed that the most suitable solution is to organize the consultations on Thursday 16 November in the afternoon, following the discussions on the agenda item 3 entitled "Financial Flows".

It was further agreed that the participatory consultations' conclusions /recommendations would not be reflected in the substantive section of the final report of the CRIC 21 session. However, and since the IWG will convene directly after the closure of the CRIC, from 18 to 20 November, the IWG will take into consideration the key findings and messages that were made during the participatory consultations.



Finally, the Chair informed that a CRIC contact group had been established on Monday 13 Nov. She reminded the Bureau that the contact group plays a crucial role in consolidating the information and salient points raised during plenary meetings, ensuring that the substantive content of the final report of the session adopted by Parties at the end of the session accurately reflects the summary of statements raised in the plenary. Summaries of plenary meetings per agenda item, prepared by the secretariat based on official documents and the discussions during the meetings of CRIC 21, will serve as a background for the work of contact group.

The contact group will conduct its work every day after 6 p.m. until Thursday 16 evening, while Friday 17 Nov. will be dedicated to finalizing the final report of the session in order to produce a comprehensive and well-documented final report that accurately captures the outcomes and potential recommendations made during CRIC 21.

The Report is to be adopted by Parties at the last plenary meeting of the CRIC on the Friday afternoon.

A bureau member thanked the CRIC Chair for the presentation of the report, and thanked also the government of Uzbekistan for their hospitality and the very successful starting of the CRIC 21 session. The same bureau member thanked also the CRIC bureau for all the effort in the preparation of the agenda of the sessions, and advised that enough/sufficient time be allocated to each agenda items at the CRIC21 and upcoming CRIC sessions to allow Parties to have effective discussions and be able to provide recommendations.

The secretariat took good note of the guidance of the bureau and will work with COP/CRIC bureaus to structure future agenda of official sessions accordingly and provide more time for discussions among delegates.

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

The CST Chair presented the agenda item and informed that the CST16 had its 4th intersessional meeting on the 5 May 2023 in Bonn, Germany and the 5th intersessional CST16 Bureau meeting on the 15 Sept. 2023 in Montpellier, France. The 17th session of the SPI took place on the 2 - 4 May 2023 in Bonn, Germany and the SPI 18th Meeting on the 11-14 September 2023, Montpellier, France .

This report covers the key issues discussed in both CST Bureau meetings, and the progress on the SPI work programme 2022-2024

The key issues discussed included: a) Maximizing of the STCs participation in CRIC and CST sessions. b) Improving the future work of the SPI. c) Inputs to IWG mid-term evaluation on how science will be organized under the UNCCD. d) Roster of the Independent Experts and the ways to further raise the profile of UNCCD science; the Progress on the SPI work programme 2022-2024 and the future work of the CST Bureau towards COP16.

Regarding the next meetings, the CST Bureau agreed on its sixth intersessional meeting to be held on 15 November 2023 in Samarkand, Uzbekistan on the margin of CRIC21.

The CST Bureau scheduled its seventh intersessional meeting on 22 March 2024, in Bonn, Germany.



The 19th Meeting of the SPI is scheduled for 19-21 March 2024 in Bonn, Germany.

A Bureau member thanked the CST Chair for introducing the agenda item III and enquired on the request of the CST Bureau (referring to the para 6 of the CST inf. Document item III/COP15 Bureau) to the secretariat to provide budget estimates for the science and technical advisers to stay for the second week during COP sessions.

A second bureau member also expressed gratitude to the CRIC21 host country for the successful organisation and hospitality and has further advised to the CST bureau and the secretariat to strengthen and promote the scientific and technology networking at the regional level (and sub-regional level). Many regions, including Latin America and the Caribbean are in needs of support on science and technology.

On the question related to the Science and Technology Correspondents (STCs) participations at COP16, the secretariat clarified that the estimates figures have not yet been shared as the secretariat was working on getting the data on the last three COPs expenditures of the STCs participations. The secretariat informed that the financial report is being finalized and will be shared to all bureau members in due time. An initial information on the question will be provided under agenda item 6.b.

On the queries raised by the bureau member on the implications of the scientist at the regional and sub regional levels, the CST bureau clarified that all efforts are being made to mobilize more experts from different countries and regions. The CST bureau is working hard to include those experiences and scientific findings into UNCCD science process.

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 process is overseen by an Intergovernmental Working Group (IWG) and guided by participatory consultations. To serve as evidence-based background for the evaluation, an independent assessment had been prepared by a team of external consultants and completed on 23 October 2023. The full report in English, together with informal translations in Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish, can be accessed here: <https://www.unccd.int/resources/reports/midterm-evaluation-unccd-2018-2030-strategic-framework-independent-assessment> . This report is a large substantive document that looks at the Strategic Framework from seven perspectives: its relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, progress to impact, sustainability and gender responsiveness, and recommends potential improvements.

In line with the terms of reference for the midterm evaluation, the findings and recommendations of the independent assessment were to be considered during the CRIC through participatory consultations held as a plenary exchange on 16 November. As the independent assessment report is a long and detailed document, its main points had been translated into a shorter and more focused conference room paper (CRP) <https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2023-10/cricCRP1-unedited.pdf> which was used as



the basis of the consultations. This CRP was made available as part of the CRIC official documents.

The secretariat further informed that the second in-person meeting of IWG-MTE was to take place from 18 to 20 November 2023, right after the CRIC. The main purpose this meeting was to establish the basis for the IWG report to COP 16, including (a) the main content and (b) the structure of the report. The IWG-MTE meeting agenda included a joint meeting with the IWG on drought on 19 November. In this meeting, the members of the two working groups were to be informed of the main topics of each group, and discuss on possible interlinkages.

b. Intergovernmental Working Group on Drought

The secretariat presented the agenda item by recalling to the COP 15 Bureau members the terms of references (ToRs) and Mandate of the IWG on drought as stated in Dec. 23/COP 15, to :

- Review and analyze all the reports which came out of the Intergovernmental Working Group on Drought 2020-21, as well as other relevant documents and Conference of the Parties decisions related to drought.
- Identify and evaluate all options, including, inter alia, global policy instruments and regional policy frameworks, and linking, where relevant, to national plans, as appropriate, to effectively manage drought under the Convention, including supporting a shift from reactive to proactive drought management.
- Prepare justifications and outline possible elements, processes, institutional arrangements, and mechanisms for establishment for each policy option.

The secretariat further informed that from 21-23 June 2023, the third IWG meeting took place in Madrid, Spain and this meeting served as a critical milestone in IWG's work.

Parties requested the IWG to prepare a progress report for consultation with Parties at the twenty-first session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (Dec. 23/COP. 15, Para 21). In line with this decision, the IWG prepared its progress report for consideration by Parties [[2315467E.pdf \(unccd.int\)](#)]. It signified the commitment of UNCCD Parties to actively address the challenges posed by droughts and contribute to sustainable land management practices worldwide.

Leading up to the forthcoming meeting of the 21st session of the Committee for the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 21), the group agreed to deliberate on the following options :

1. Finance : to explore (i) new financing mechanisms for drought resilience and/or (ii) strengthen existing financial mechanisms, e.g., GEF/GM.
2. Technical : (i) to set a global target for drought resilience, and to implement monitoring and reporting on it at regular intervals; and/or (ii) develop a global work programme on proactive drought management with the aim of strengthening and facilitating the implementation of measures for addressing drought in an effective manner at all levels, along with enhancing drought preparedness, community and ecosystem resilience, and the adoption of a holistic and integrated approach.



3. Legally binding options: to explore options for (i) a legally binding Amendment to the Convention and/ or (ii) a protocol or Agreement under the auspices of the Convention.
4. Non-legally binding option: to explore the options of adopting: (i) non-legally binding decisions, political declaration, or other kind of non-legally binding instruments outside the Convention and/or (ii) non-legally binding decisions, political declaration, or other kind of non-legally binding instruments under the Convention.

The secretariat also informed on the upcoming meetings of the IWG :

- 13-17 November 2023: IWG presenting progress report during CRIC21 in Samarkand, Uzbekistan
- 18-20 November 2023: 4th IWG Meeting in Samarkand, Uzbekistan
- March 18-21 2024 : 5th in-person meeting Santiago, Chile
- 03-06 June 2024 Final IWG Meeting
- July/August 2024 IWG report among COP documents
- December 2024 COP 16 in the Saudi Arabia

The IWG finally requested guidance to the COP15 Bureau members on identifying the successors of the following former members: Ms. Kathrin Ehlert, representative of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), who left the organisation; Mr. Gerald Kairu, Global Water Partnership (GWP) representative, who separated from the GWP effective 31 October 2023; and Mr. Pedro Berliner, JUSCANZ IWG member is no longer associated with IWG.

Thanked the secretariat for introducing the agenda item, a bureau member requested more information on the applications of the IWG membership and its process. The secretariat presented the list of participants, criteria and all the short-listed candidates.

A second bureau member thanked the secretariat for the presentation and stressed on the need of considering both Gender balance and technical competences for the replacement. Another bureau member found it unfortunate that the IWG process was going on without the inputs of the WMO since March 2023 and requested that the bureau takes immediate action in providing guidance on the replacement at the earliest possible.

After further discussions and exchanges, the Bureau selected as new IWG members Ms. Catherin Desiree Gamper, the representative of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Mr. Robert J. Stefanski, the representative of WMO. The bureau thanked the outgoing IWG members for their service.

V. Status of Organisation of COP16 : Presentation by the Host Country

The representative of Saudi Arabia presented the agenda item informing the bureau members that the draft Host Country Agreement (HCA) had already been prepared and agreed with the secretariat. The signature of the HCA is foreseen for early next year 2024. Organizational and structural committees have been established for the COP16 preparation. Weekly meetings between the secretariat and the host country are taking place for the successful organisation of the COP.



A first planning mission of the secretariat has already been organized in Riyadh last June 2023 to work on the potential venue options for COP16. A second planning mission to Riyadh is also foreseen for January 2023.

VI. Other Business

a. Report from the Board of Auditors

The representative of the board of directors presented the Report of the United Nations Board of Auditors (UNBOA) on the financial statements of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification for the year ended 31 December 2022.

In the report the board made recommendations on Financial and Managerial aspects to the secretariat for further consideration.

A bureau member thanked the UNBOA for the presentation and enquired about the number of recommendations that are yet to be implemented by the secretariat.

The UNBOA clarified that there are in total nineteen (19) recommendations in the report, seven (7) of them have been completely implemented. An additional three (3) recommendations on risk management, and (six) 6 on finances, are under implementation.

The UNBOA underlined the need for the secretariat to adopt a plan for the implementation of the remaining recommendations.

b. Status of the UNCCD core budget

The secretariat also presented the status of the UNCCD core budget, which has been severely affected by the high inflation. With business-as-usual, the approved budget would be exceeded by nearly 8% by the end of the triennium. The secretariat noted that measures are being taken to avoid such over-expenditure, and that as 2024 will be a very demanding year, with a heavy workload, such measures cannot include cuts to the currently filled staff positions. Instead, core budget savings are sought by effective use of extrabudgetary resources.

The secretariat stressed that next UNCCD budget should address the impact of the inflation. Furthermore, considering that the budget has remained at zero nominal growth level for more than a decade, although the Convention process has evolved in many ways, the next budget should also be more responsive to the tasks set to the secretariat and the GM.

The Bureau members took note with concern of the status of the UNCCD budget, and agreed on the need to start discussing on how to proceed with the next UNCCD budget well in advance to the COP. One bureau member proposed that the secretariat organizes informal online consultations to provide more detail and transparency on the status of its resources (contributions – voluntary, indicative and outstandings, expenditures per program of work), and on its proposals for the next budget. This will support Parties to better understand the financial situation of the secretariat, and provide a basis for their internal consideration of the level of ambition and funding for the UNCCD in the future. The secretariat welcomed the proposal and will prepare for such consultations.



VII. Next Meeting

A next bureau meeting is foreseen before the summer break (May/June) of 2024, venue and the agenda will be discussed with the COP15 Presidency prior reverting to all bureau members.