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**INTERIM REPORT ON THE STATUS OF PREPARATION OF THE 2006
INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF DESERTS AND DESERTIFICATION**

Note by the secretariat

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The General Assembly of the United Nations, concerned by the exacerbation of desertification, particularly in Africa, and its far-reaching implications for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in particular on poverty eradication, declared at its fifty-eighth ordinary session 2006 the International Year of Deserts and Desertification (IYDD) as a means of raising public awareness on the issue of desertification and in order to protect the biological diversity, the knowledge and traditions of those communities affected by desertification.
2. The present document provides information on the steps taken by the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), as designated focal point for the International Year, for the implementation of General Assembly resolution 58/211.
3. The note describes the objectives identified for the IYDD and indicates the concrete actions taken in terms of coordination and cooperation with major institutional partners and Parties to the UNCCD.
4. The last chapter of the document is devoted to the conclusions and possible recommendations to the Conference of the Parties (COP) for a successful celebration of the IYDD.

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CONTENTS

	<u>Paragraphs</u>	<u>Page</u>
I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION	1 – 3	3
II. LINES OF ACTION FOR THE IYDD	4 – 7	3
III. STATUS OF PREPARATION.....	8 – 33	6
A. International	9 – 28	6
B. National	29 – 32	9
C. Secretariat level	33	10
IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	34 – 37	10

Annex

Tentative list of activities for the celebration of the International Year of Deserts and Desertification.....	12
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I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. The twenty-second session of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, recalling the UNCCD, the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Environment Initiative of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), adopted decision 22/15, inviting the General Assembly of the United Nations to consider declaring an international year of deserts and desertification as soon as possible (see UNEP/GC.22/11, annex I).

2. The General Assembly of the United Nations, at its fifty-eighth ordinary session, adopted resolution A/RES/58/211 which declares 2006 the International Year of Deserts and Desertification. In doing so, the General Assembly underlined its deep concern for the exacerbation of desertification, particularly in Africa, and duly noted its far-reaching implications for the implementation of the MDGs, in particular on poverty eradication.

3. The resolution aims at persuading governments to contribute to the activities of the year and to raise public awareness of the issue in order to protect the biological diversity, and the knowledge and traditions of those communities affected by desertification. The resolution also adopted a number of provisions, placing particular emphasis on:

- Designating the Executive Secretary of the UNCCD as focal point of the Year, in conjunction with UNEP, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and other relevant bodies of the United Nations;
- Inviting all countries to establish national committees or focal points and to celebrate the Year by arranging appropriate activities;
- Calling upon all relevant international organizations and Member States to support the activities related to desertification, including land degradation, to be organized by affected countries, in particular African countries and the least developed countries; and
- Encouraging countries to contribute, as they are able, to the Convention and to undertake special initiatives in observance of the Year with the goal of enhancing the implementation of the Convention.

II. LINES OF ACTION FOR THE IYDD

4. The designation by the General Assembly of 2006 as the IYDD coincides with the tenth anniversary of the entry into force of the UNCCD. The Convention was adopted in Paris on 17 June 1994 and opened for signature in the same venue on 14-15 October 1994. It entered into force on 26 December 1996, 90 days after the fiftieth ratification was received. To this day, the Convention counts 191 Parties, making it one of the most representative instruments of the Rio generation.

5. Within that perspective, the IYDD is being conceived as an enhanced opportunity to strengthen the visibility and importance of the drylands issue on the international environmental agenda. As such, it constitutes a unique opportunity to bring the message of the people of the drylands to the world while at the same time underlining the daily plight of the drylands' communities and their commitment to the objectives of sustainable development. In this way, it represents a strong reminder to the international community of the immense challenges that still lie ahead in this field.

6. The celebration of the IYDD can be seen as a unique opportunity to strengthen the momentum of the UNCCD process by increasing its profile and visibility and by promoting the role and comparative advantages of its Parties and institutional partners.

7. In order to capitalize fully on the expected added momentum to be brought to the UNCCD process by the IYDD, its conception, launching and celebration is to be designed and organized around the promotion of the Convention process and the specific and complementary comparative advantages of its multilateral and bilateral partners. In this context, it is expected that the Year will lead to the achievement of a set of concrete and measurable objectives regrouped under the acronym LAND:

(a) Long-term oriented implementation of the UNCCD: Promote targeted community, national and international events with the aim of enhancing the implementation of the Convention, helping to raise awareness of desertification and to focus attention on the way Parties, local communities and individuals contribute to the combating of desertification, with due emphasis on the local level. According to the Bonn Declaration (decision 8/COP.4), country Parties would need to make all the necessary arrangements so as to ensure that the formulation of action programmes is finalized by the end of 2005. The year 2006 could be used as the starting line for a broad implementation of those programmes worldwide.

The momentum generated by the IYDD could be of paramount importance for the UNCCD implementation process by creating a multiplier effect at the national and international levels. Partnership agreements and donor round tables could be foreseen during the Year for the launching of the implementation of the action programmes. The private sector could be further involved in the process through the preparation of strategic financial support for targeted areas of interest to different stakeholders.

(b) Awareness of desertification implications: Profile desertification as a major threat to vulnerable ecosystems and to mankind, reinforced under the scenarios of climate change and loss of biological diversity, with due emphasis on the relationship with food insecurity, poverty, migration and conflicts in the context of the MDGs.

(c) Networking with all the stakeholders: Encourage the mobilization of a broad and innovative international partnership to combat land degradation and desertification through patronage and partnerships with Parties, national and international organizations, civil society, academic institutions and private sector corporations.

The General Assembly, by designating the Executive Secretary of the UNCCD as focal point of the Year, and including the relevant bodies of the United Nations, especially

UNEP, UNDP and IFAD, made a clear indication of the need for partnership in the implementation of this Convention. Accordingly, it builds upon the UNCCD mandate for partnership and collaboration with the United Nations organizations in the implementation of the Convention for the successful celebration of the IYDD.

Furthermore, and within the framework of the Secretary-General's Global Compact initiative, the secretariat intends to take advantage of the advertising opportunity and international visibility provided by the IYDD in order to promote an enhanced involvement of the private sector not only to fulfil the goals of the IYDD but also to support the overall implementation of the Convention.

Additionally, and according to General Assembly resolution 58/211, the secretariat would encourage and actively assist the 191 country Parties to the Convention to establish IYDD national committees, which will be in charge of coordinating the celebration of the Year at the national level. The objective of the IYDD national committees will be to prepare, implement and follow up on IYDD activities in the countries. The way in which these committees perform will be decided at the country level. However, the secretariat could assist the different structures by preparing guidelines for the committee's establishment and providing suggestions on their composition and work. These committees could be constituted by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations, scientific institutions and the public sector so as to ensure the representation of all stakeholders, avoid duplication of the activities proposed and help to broaden the circulation of information.

(d) Dissemination of UNCCD-related information: Focus attention on human activities that spread desertification throughout all regions of the planet. Fine-tune the message so as to also address emerging fields of interest and potential consequences that go beyond traditional focus fields (such as poverty and hunger, social unrest, political instability, conflict or mass migrations). Provide elements on what works to counter fatalistic perceptions. In this context, emphasize the economic importance of ecosystem services in the drylands and best practices to maintain or rehabilitate them. Disseminate the information through all possible channels.

For that purpose, the secretariat should create a dedicated IYDD website that should be set up well in advance of that year and run from the UNCCD website, taking all activities online.

The IYDD website should become a "one-stop-shop" that uses a simple static interface. The site's prime purpose is to make information flow, especially to key correspondents writing for the leading opinion press. It should comprise a dedicated section for media monitoring where recent press clippings from around the world are posted.

Simply establishing one website as a resource base will not, however, provide the necessary technical backstopping required by journalists worldwide. While the project will aim at establishing a web-based information centre and database, it will nevertheless need to strengthen the web of networks of journalists and other relevant information providers. The system should consider including scientific and technical information into the network.

At the end of the Year 2006 it is expected that a large network of environmental journalists in both developed and developing countries will have a better understanding of the global relevance of desertification. Furthermore, it is also expected that target groups, including government representatives, NGOs, local communities and the general public will be benefiting from the dissemination and sharing of a growing array of best practices and lessons learned in the implementation of UNCCD projects through a variety of media channels.

III. STATUS OF PREPARATION

8. Since the declaration of the IYDD by the General Assembly on 23 December 2003, the secretariat has given due priority to coordinating efforts with potential partners for the timely preparation and successful celebration of the Year. In this regard, the strategy adopted focuses on two main areas of intervention: international and national, while duly addressing necessary in-house organization.

A. International

9. With the view of defining a common strategy for the celebration of the IYDD and to make the most of the numerous comparative advantages and expertise of the United Nations system, an inter-agency committee has been constituted, bringing together the principal institutional partners of the United Nations active in the UNCCD implementation process, including those specifically designated by General Assembly resolution A/RES/58/211 (UNEP, UNDP, IFAD, the World Bank, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Volunteers, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and others). Acknowledging the role that the Government of Algeria intends to play in this process as one of its *chefs de file* and to its unique contribution to the adoption of the Year by the United Nations, an invitation has been extended to one of its representatives to join the inter-agency committee.

10. This was consistent with the view expressed by the inter-agency committee regarding the need to go beyond inter-institutional cooperation and secure the conclusion of bilateral partnerships with country Parties. It was deemed particularly important in terms of fundraising capacity.

11. A tentative list of activities has been identified by the members of the inter-agency committee for the commemoration of the IYDD and is attached as an annex to the present report. For specific budget figures and further information on each one of the activities, please see document ICCD/COP(7)/2/Add.2.

12. In the spirit and intended scope of General Assembly resolution 58/211, the activities tentatively identified invest essentially the fields of media, culture and communication, with a view to launching an ambitious information and awareness raising campaign aimed at international public opinion and decision-makers.

Other activities at the international level

13. In addition to the activities jointly planned and scheduled by the inter-agency cluster, partner international organizations have also foreseen the organization of specific initiatives on the basis of their respective fields of expertise and mandate.

14. In this regard, and further to a request by the UNCCD Executive Secretary, the Council of the Universal Postal Union (UPU) has adopted and sent a circular in the six UPU official languages (English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Portuguese) to national postal administrations worldwide, encouraging the production of stamps for the promotion and commemoration of the IYDD. A similar request has been addressed to the United Nations Postal Administration (UNPA) for the production of a series of stamps portraying the two issues at stake: deserts and desertification.

15. UNEP, a long-standing partner of the UNCCD secretariat, is also planning to launch two publications on the occasion of the IYDD: the first, entitled “Global Environmental Outlook for Deserts Report” (GEO-Deserts) is expected to be published in June 2006 to mark the World Environment Day and the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, 5 and 17 June respectively. The second publication, highlighting UNEP’s activities in dryland environmental management, is to be launched in September/October 2006. Furthermore, UNEP is planning a scientific conference on the theme “Dryland Environmental Management and the Millennium Development Goals”, to be held tentatively at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi, in September/October 2006.

16. Building upon its pioneering role in the field of desertification, UNESCO, in collaboration with the UNCCD secretariat and a group of partner agencies (FAO, UNDP, UNEP, IFAD, United Nations University (UNU), United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Relief (UNISDR), World Meteorological Organization (WMO), GEF, the Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS), the International Council for Science and others) is planning to organize an international scientific conference, entitled “The Future of Drylands”. This conference, tentatively scheduled to take place in Tunis, Tunisia at the end of June 2006 will endeavor take stock of 50 years of experience in dryland studies, policies and development programmes and will help to redefine future priorities to promote sustainable development in the world’s drylands. A call for papers will be launched soon and it is hoped that a number of experts of affected country Parties will be supported in order that they may attend the conference.

17. Based on the success of the first edition of the UNESCO-UNCCD education kit on combating desertification which was widely diffused to primary schools in countries affected by desertification, UNESCO expects, in cooperation with the UNCCD secretariat, to finalize a new edition of the kit. The new kit labelled “A creative approach to environmental education in drylands and highlands” will be targeted at primary and secondary schools in dryland and mountainous countries.

18. The CBD based on the Joint Programme of Work on the Biodiversity of Dry and Sub-humid Lands would collaborate with the UNCCD and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change secretariats to hold a regional synergy workshop in Asia or Latin

America and the Caribbean in 2006 so as to implement the programmes of work on dry and sub-humid lands and agricultural biodiversity.

19. UNDP will put in place a process for communicating information on the IYDD to UNDP Resident Representatives so as to encourage active country level participation during the celebration of World Day to Combat Desertification and support advocacy efforts for hunger and poverty eradication in the drylands. UNDP will also support a number of countries celebrating the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, thus raising the profile of the events in each country and publicizing the overall effort globally. UNDP is also preparing a challenge paper entitled "Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in the Drylands".

20. In 2006 FAO will operationalize the Land Degradation Assessment in Drylands (LADA) Programme, which should provide and disseminate a number of information and awareness documents. In addition, FAO also started to promote the forestry dialogue in eastern, southern and western parts of Africa in collaboration with subregional organizations.

21. IFAD has established an interdepartmental working group to develop a communication plan with the aim of enhancing the objectives of the IYDD. In collaboration with the Global Mechanism, it will prepare a showcasing of IFAD's experience, with particular emphasis on women and desertification. IFAD will also prepare a learning note on the UNCCD to draw lessons from relevant country and project case studies to facilitate mainstreaming of the objectives of the Convention.

22. In addition to the above-mentioned international organizations, several countries and regional authorities have already shown their interest in organizing international events for the celebration of the IYDD.

23. The Government of Spain has indicated its willingness to explore ways and means of organizing a seminar on migration and desertification. Building upon the very successful International Symposium on Desertification and Migrations organized jointly in 1995 by the Government of Spain and the UNCCD secretariat, this seminar would address the extremely important links between land degradation, poverty and migration, one of the most visible and relevant consequences of desertification.

24. In the same framework, the Government of Italy has positively responded to the General Assembly call by supporting the UNCCD secretariat in the organization of an International Film Festival on Deserts and Desertification, "Desert Nights". The festival would aim to raise the awareness of the public at large, on the issue of desertification as it relates to social and cultural dimensions, to promote cultural identities and local capacities of dryland communities and to identify and launch concrete actions in support to affected developing countries, particularly in the area of arts and culture. The films presented at the International Film Festival would portray daily life in drylands.

25. Regarding the involvement of local authorities, the Government of Bavaria has planned to organize in Rosenheim, Germany from March to October 2006, a major archeological and cultural exhibition on the deserts of the world. The exhibition will portray the origin and changing face of deserts over thousands of years. Adopting an interactive approach the exhibit

aims at portraying in an interactive manner the unique fauna and flora of these ecosystems as well as the adaptation strategies developed by its communities.

Honorary spokespersons for the IYDD

26. In order to promote an enhanced international profile for the IYDD and to ensure the indispensable public and media visibility required for its successful promotion worldwide, the UNCCD secretariat explored the possibility of associating internationally recognized figures with the celebration of the Year.

27. In this context, and after consultations with the Office of the Secretary-General, Professor Wangari Maathai, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate for 2004, and H.E. Mr. Cherif Rahmani, Minister of Environment of Algeria, have been appointed honorary spokespersons for the IYDD.

28. Currently the UNCCD secretariat is exploring possibilities to associate further personalities for the Year. Aware of the singular impact that personalities drawn from the fields of culture and entertainment can have on public opinion, its efforts are currently focusing on those specific areas.

B. National

29. The Executive Secretary contacted all Parties to inform them of the decision taken by the General Assembly and to request information as to how the IYDD would be commemorated at the national level. At the same time, country Parties were encouraged to do everything possible to provide high visibility to the activities forming part of the celebration of the Year and in so doing, to ensure the greatest possible impact at the national, regional, and international levels. In this regard, a questionnaire was sent to all the Parties to identify the person and/or institution that would be responsible for coordinating these activities at the national level.

30. Pursuant to paragraph 19 of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) resolution 1980/67, relating to the procedures for organizing the celebration of international years and anniversaries, the letter indicated that provisions should be made for national committees to be set up to prepare for, conduct and follow up on the international year, in close cooperation with the secretariat. In this context and in order to fully build upon the comparative advantage of the UNCCD implementation process at the national level, the secretariat encouraged Parties, when applicable, to consider entrusting their respective national committee on desertification with this task.

31. So far, the secretariat has received 20 confirmations from Parties in that regard. The secretariat is aware that Parties are still in the process of internal consultations and estimates that the remaining confirmations will be received in due course. The activities foreseen by those countries that have replied to the request include a wide range of areas of interest and events that would certainly help in raising the visibility of the IYDD at the country level. The events could be grouped as follows:

- Conferences / workshops / seminars (academic lectures, scientific meetings, press conferences)

- Cultural events (museum exhibits, musical events, film festivals)
- Awareness-raising activities (production of material, recognition coins, stamps, organization of campaigns and competitions).

32. A list of these activities, together with their scheduled timing will be made available on line in order to ease the exchange of information between countries and allow for replication.

C. Secretariat level

33. In addition to the coordination role assigned to him by General Assembly resolution 58/211, the Executive Secretary has also identified core activities to be promoted and launched by the secretariat for 2006:

- Preparation of promotional publications and memorabilia: New information products would be available in all six official languages of the United Nations (2006 booklet, flyers, IYDD press kit, poster campaign, etc);
- Television/Radio: screen/broadcast clips/films/documentations/interviews on deserts and desertification. Indeed, the IYDD lends itself to launching a whole series of documentary programmes on desertification that could be produced and broadcasted by major international media organizations and networks;
- Establishment of a dedicated website with contact information, list of activities/events, guidelines and other issues related to the international Year;
- Photo competition: UNCCD has also launched a photo contest to promote the IYDD in 2006. A jury of eminent personalities will select the three photos that conceptually and artistically best depict the problem of land degradation. The project has been put in place thanks to the generous support of Hewlett Packard, the World Bank, TerrAfrica, the International Fertilizer Industry Association, Landgraedsa Rikisins, the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies and ENTICO Corporation Ltd.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

34. The Executive Secretary has been able to mobilize an important number of partners in order to secure the critical level of cooperation and partnership required for the fruitful celebration of the IYDD.

35. At the international level, and through the active involvement of those agencies identified by General Assembly resolution 58/211 and the other international institutions active in the UNCCD implementation process, a promising tentative schedule of activities has been agreed upon. At the national level, and after an expected period of consultations and information, encouraging feedback has started to reach the secretariat, with several countries indicating their interest in playing an important role in the celebration of the IYDD.

36. However, and in view of time constraints facing the secretariat, more active support and timely responses from the country Parties would be highly appreciated. Furthermore, and in spite of the additional workload generated by the organization of the IYDD, all the estimated additional costs required for the coordination and celebration of the IYDD have been proposed as extra-budgetary activities and accordingly included in the Supplementary Fund document ICCD/COP(7)/2/Add.2.

37. The COP may therefore wish to encourage country Parties to contribute to the UNCCD Special Fund in order to ensure the proper fulfilment of General Assembly resolution 58/211.

Annex

**TENTATIVE LIST OF ACTIVITIES FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE
INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF DESERTS AND DESERTIFICATION**

YEAR 2005

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|-----------------------|---|
| July/August | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establishment of a special IYDD unit in the secretariat and recruitment of a team of consultants |
| September | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Joint press conference with Mr. Rahmani, Ms. Maathai and the Executive Secretary in New York, United States of America during the Millennium Heads of States Summit• Installation of IYDD information stands in the General Assembly Hall (fifty-ninth and sixtieth sessions including on the Universal Exhibition in Japan) |
| October | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• COP 7• Organization of side event on the IYDD |
| October/
November | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presentation of the Secretary-General's report on the status of preparation for the IYDD• Briefing of the regional groups of the United Nations• Organization of side event on IYDD• Joint reception in the Delegates Dining Room |
| November | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organization of a special trip for international journalists to the Sahara as prelude to a series of articles on the IYDD |
| November/
December | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Edition and production of specialized publications on the IYDD• Production of articles of memorabilia for the IYDD |

YEAR 2006

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| January | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Launching of the programme of celebration of the IYDD in each country• Launching of national commemorative stamps |
| January/
February | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Production of advertising inserts and TV spots |
| February | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assessment and review of the UNCCD implementation at the global level. Event: Global meeting. Venue: Argentina |
| February | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Youth and the Environment: Lessons and Perspectives in Africa. Africa meeting. Venue: Mali |

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|--------------|--|
| March | • Launching of specialized training seminars on environmental journalism |
| April | • Women and desertification: Assessing the role of women in the implementation of the Convention. Event: Global meeting. Venue: China |
| May | • Launching of the Film Festival “Desert Nights”. Venue: Rome |
| June (early) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-level conference “The Protection of Deserts and the combat against Desertification”. Venue: Algiers • Inauguration of the Observatory of the Environment and the Combat against Desertification, Museum of the Institute of Deserts in Ghardaïa, Algeria |
| 5 June | • Celebration of World Environment Day |
| 17 June | • World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought: major media event in the presence of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and Professor Wangari Maathai. Venue: Algiers |
| June (end) | • UNESCO Conference, “The Future of Arid Lands” |
| September | • Launching of the cultural exhibition “Drylands 2006” at the Kunsthalle, Bonn, Germany |
| October | • Presentation by Mr. Cherif Rahmani and Professor Wangari Maathai of the report to the Secretary-General to the General Assembly of the United Nations |
