



## **- MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE COP 14 BUREAU (26 JUNE 2020) -**

Due to the current situation, the first intersessional COP 14 Bureau meeting has been held virtually, on the 26 June 2020. Openings remarks were provided by the President, His Excellency Mr. Prakash Javadekar, Minister of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change and UNCCD Executive Secretary Mr. Ibrahim Thiaw.

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

### **I. Adoption of the Agenda**

The agenda was adopted without modification.

### **II. Importance of land-based solutions for healthy people**

A brief presentation on this first agenda item was made by UNCCD Executive Secretary underlining the need to treat the land as a natural capital to sustain a healthy planet. In that respect he underlined that land-based solutions could help tackle the COVID-19 crisis by addressing the primary environmental driver of emerging infectious disease outbreaks, strengthening the resilience and security of our food and water systems and reducing the crisis' impact on the most vulnerable people.

A bureau member proposed a slight reformulation of para 5 of the document submitted under item.1, so as to mention "consumption" as one of the main causes behind the spreading of the pandemic.

Another bureau member added that, the promotion and implementation of the Land-based solutions for healthy people and healthy planet will also imply more cooperation, coordination, and harmonization of actions with all UNCCD stakeholder's including international organizations and the other sister's convention.

The secretariat took note of the remarks of the bureau members, and underlined that the theme "Building Back Better" is embodied in a concept being built as a communication campaign to raise awareness, with a view to draw attention on the fact that Nature/Land is are part of the solution to the current pandemic situation.

### **III. UNCCD response to COVID-19**

The UNCCD Executive Secretary introduced the item, highlighting the safeguarding of UNCCD staff well-being and safety as his utmost priority. At the moment, up to a threshold of 40 % of UN Bonn personnel has been allowed to return to the office, while observing strict social distancing and hygiene regulations.



One bureau member expressed appreciation to the Executive Secretary for the measures taken to safeguard UNCCD staff and their families and the importance to all Parties of the Secretariat taking such an approach.

The Executive Secretary stressed that the secretariat has to adapt to the current situation to improve its service delivery. The UNCCD secretariat and the Global Mechanism conducted a brief internal analysis of how the UNCCD, and its priorities are in line with the COVID-19 situation. On that basis, the work programme was reviewed in order to ensure that the COVID-19 realities were duly taken into account and where feasible, efficiently addressed. The Executive Secretary reiterated the objective of the review; aimed at:

1. Finding alternative ways of running the operations (teleworking, webinars, etc.)
2. Delivering a strong message on the role of addressing DLDD for the health and well-being of people,
3. Prioritizing action that promotes the perception of land as a safety net and a recovery tool for safeguarding people's lives and their livelihoods, with particular attention to LDN as the key UNCCD response mechanism, and
4. Further establishing the UNCCD as a platform for a transformative change toward building back better, smarter and stronger.

The focus has now been centred around a three-track response framework which seeks to (i) address the human face of the global crisis; (ii) safeguard people's lives and their livelihoods; (iii) and allow us to build back better, smarter and stronger.

One bureau member expressed appreciation for the agility shown by the Secretariat in switching the staff over to working remotely and to shifting events to virtual formats.

One bureau member enquired about the eventuality of possible budget adjustment in that respect.

One bureau member further inquired about the delays in some work products since it is anticipated that consultants already work remotely and it was not clear whether there were delays in securing contracts or if some work had been delayed in order to prioritize other activities that had become more urgent in light of the pandemic.

One bureau member also proposed to increase the focus of the secretariat's actions on people's livelihood and drought – which is supposed to be a key focus of the current biennium – rather than on Land Degradation Neutrality, which still seemed to take an overly large part of the secretariat's prioritized work plan elements.

The Executive Secretary explained that the actual financial situation of the secretariat was satisfactory. The secretariat does not anticipate any major implications in terms of budget lines. No major disruptions in terms of the core budget is anticipated. Options were also explored in terms of increased flexibility in the use of extra budgetary funding.

The Executive Secretary also underlined that Land Degradation Neutrality could not be achieved without a proper focus and priority given to people's livelihood. Resolving some



of the basic needs of the communities on the ground is essential to achieve the Land Degradation Neutrality.

Drought also remain a key priority, and the secretariat is mobilizing partners including ARC (African Risk Capacity) to explore new and innovative solutions for Drought, particularly in Africa.

The Executive Secretary further underlined that no major change has been introduced in the work programme agreed at the last COP, which remains the secretariat's guiding and binding framework. The document (2.b) presented is a combination of adjustment to the work programme, encompassing few new ideas, all within the actual framework and considering budget aspects and current restrictions (travel, face to face meeting etc.).

#### **IV. Update from the G 20 Presidency on Land Issues**

The Saudi G20 Presidency updated the bureau members on the G 20's roadmap of proposed actions to tackle Land Degradation and habitat loss, as well as coral reef protection.

The proposed actions on the ground will be focused on four main components: avoiding, reducing, restoring and sustainable management.

After the presentation of the agenda item, a bureau member invited the G 20 Presidency to share the final version of the concept note of the G20 initiative on addressing Land Degradation Neutrality.

A bureau member further raised the issue on the relation between the UNCCD mandate and the proposed initiative and working areas of the G 20 Presidency and stressed the importance of avoiding duplication with the work of the UNCCD or existing initiatives in any new G20 initiative.

The G 20 Presidency reported that preliminary consultations have been made taking into consideration work plans and ongoing activities of the UNCCD secretariat, UNEP, IUCN and FAO to avoid any overlapping and duplication.

#### **V. Building back better: leveraging multilateral platforms on the road to Rio+ 30**

When introducing the item, secretariat underlined that the Joint Liaison Group of the Rio Conventions has been duly revitalized (meeting in Heads of Agency and Sherpa level). The Executive Secretaries agreed to the development of a common outreach and engagement plan for the coming 18-month period, as a road map towards Rio +30. It is expected that a key element of that outreach would be built around the idea of a Social Contract for Nature.

A Social Contract for Nature is founded on the recognition that the long-term resilience and wellbeing of humanity depends on the health and integrity of nature, including land, in its full biological diversity and functional complexity.



A bureau member thanked the secretariat for its effort to make available many useful documentations and brochures but requested more focused ‘tools’ to be made available so as to help parties to be more pragmatic and active while articulating linkages between the work of the UNCCD and how it could be leveraged to support national and global efforts to recover from the pandemic in their national -level efforts to support the Convention.

A bureau member further requested the secretariat to clarify its communication on the ‘Social Contract for Nature’ theme, so as to make it more understandable by parties, noting that the currently used phrasing could be easily misunderstood in light of recent global events, and expressed their understanding that this phrasing is meant to be a branding tool and does not reflect a new program or other initiative of the three secretariats, as such would need to be approved and funded by the Parties of all three Conventions.

The Executive Secretary indicated the concern that ‘build back better’ was perhaps too generic and being used for many pandemic recovery-related things. He confirmed that this social contract phrasing currently being utilized was meant as a branding/communications tool by the three secretariats to bring nature into the conversation and that it did not reflect a new activity.

## **VI. Update on statutory meetings: CRIC 19 and COP 15**

The update on CRIC 19 was introduced by the CRIC Chair.

CRIC 19 is tentatively scheduled to take place in Bonn, Germany from 24 to 26 November 2020 for a duration of three consecutive days. A one-day Training Fair and one-day Regional preparatory meetings are also scheduled and would precede CRIC 19.

Following a thorough assessments of conference facilities, the CRIC 19 session would be held within the premises of the World Conference Center Bonn (WCCB) with additional meetings to be organized at the UN Bonn Campus. Similar to past CRIC sessions, no side events will be organized during CRIC 19.

The secretariat further pointed out that the situation remained extremely fluid in so far as the pandemic was concerned and, hence, several key variables were not fully resolved. Accordingly, any planning process remained per se, an indicative objective. Based on a cluster of subjective and objective indicators, including health policies being currently implemented, both globally and by the host country as well as possible evolution of the pandemic after the summer period, it is possible that conditions may not be met to hold an event of such a global nature by November of this year. The secretariat is closely monitoring the situation with different partners, including the host country, with a view to update parties in that respect by the second half of July.

The ongoing pandemic of COVID 19 presents a major logistical and financial challenge in terms of the physical organization of statutory meetings. Accordingly, the secretariat is also considering the possibility that CRIC may need to be postponed to early 2021.



Since many face-to-face meetings are being postponed to early next year, the secretariat could face problems in securing a suitable venue. Taking further into consideration the need to organize the fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 15) in the fall of 2021, timing remains of essence. A postponement of CRIC 19 beyond March may not be viable because preparations for CRIC 19 and COP 15 would overlap and overstretch the capacity of the secretariat and the Global Mechanism to adequately prepare for both sessions.

Should the evolution of the pandemic not allow for the organization of CRIC19 in 2021, the secretariat would also consider, as a last resort and in consultations with its designated service providers (i.e. UNOG), options to organize the meeting virtually.

Informal exchanges on the hosting the COP 15 took place with several interested parties, some of whom showed a strong interest in the matter. Unfortunately, in the wake of the Covid19 pandemic, none of these could lead to a final confirmation.

At present, the UNCCD secretariat is engaged in a new round of consultations with other potential hosts. Should these consultations fail to bear positive results, the secretariat will take necessary steps to organize the next COP in Bonn, Germany, the site of the Convention secretariat, towards the end of 2021.

A bureau member expressed the strong preference to have CRIC 19 held in person; if not feasible this year, preferably in the first quarter of 2021.

A bureau member further added that due to the time zone between countries many of them would not be able to join if the meeting would be held virtually. In addition, some developing countries will face challenges related to limited internet access as well as unfamiliarity with teleconferencing software which will compromise their negotiation position.

Another bureau member recommended not to have the meeting held virtually as CRIC is an important meeting for negotiations, which would be hardly practicable online.

Acknowledging the unpredictability of the pandemic situation, a bureau member inquired about the financial situation of the Convention should the CRIC need to be shifted to 2021 in light of the fact that funds provided by the UNGA are only accessible in 2020.

The Executive Secretary clarified that in person meeting remains the first and preferable option. However, he also underlined the need to remain open to the need to remain flexible and open to possible options given the many uncertainties faced.

The Executive Secretary confirmed his intention to revert to bureau members and parties in July, to present options related to the scheduling and funding of the CRIC.

## **VII. Other Business**

No other business has been addressed.