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## CRIC Bureau Virtual Meeting Report 29 October 2020

### I. Welcoming Remarks by the CRIC Chair

1. Mr. Trevor Benn (Guyana), Chair of the CRIC Bureau, welcomed the Bureau and noted that the meeting is happening at a time when the COVID 19 pandemic continues to be a global challenge at unprecedented levels in many countries. He noted that scientists have pointed out that a vaccine might not be ready before mid-2021 and asked the Bureau members to reflect on the implications of this worsening situation as regards the format of the upcoming 19<sup>th</sup> session of the CRIC.
2. Mr Benn further noted that while some National Focal Points in the current situation would still prefer an in-person CRIC 19 session, others have expressed a concern and deem a virtual session more realistic.
3. The CRIC Chair applauded the work of the secretariat in adapting to the current situation and called for the Bureau to reach a consensus on the pending question regarding the format of CRIC 19, highlighting the importance of the decisions that will be taken by the Bureau during this meeting.
4. The CRIC Chair concluded by welcoming Ms Tina Birmpili to her new appointment as Deputy Executive Secretary of the UNCCD further stating that the Bureau is looking forward to working with her.

### II. Welcoming Remarks by the Deputy Executive Secretary

5. In her remarks, Ms. Tina Birmpili, UNCCD's newly appointed Deputy Executive Secretary, thanked the Bureau for agreeing to meet virtually today, especially since the meeting coincided with a holiday celebrated by some of its members to whom she expressed thanks and good wishes.
6. Ms. Birmpili echoed the words of the CRIC Chair reiterating that we are living in an unprecedented situation and that the COVID 19 pandemic has surged to new heights all over the world. She noted that the pandemic has not only tested our ways of living but also the ways by which we perform our duties. The role of the secretariat, she added, is to provide options and to facilitate discussions and negotiations of Parties in whatever format and way possible. She noted that the secretariat has prepared a suggestion which she hoped would form the basis of a fruitful discussion among Bureau members so that their guidance will clear the path for an effective planning of the session.
7. Ms. Birmpili also noted that the COP Bureau has discussed CRIC 19 preparation twice and that members of the Bureau have previously expressed their views and preferences on how to move ahead on issues relating to the session. Since a decision on the format of CRIC is to be made by the CRIC Bureau in consultation with the Executive Secretary, she added that the guidance received from the CRIC Bureau at this meeting will be critical.
8. Ms. Birmpili highlighted that the proposed plan of action which will be presented today by the secretariat has been developed in accordance with the rules of procedures and principles that govern intergovernmental meetings under the UNCCD.



### **III. Adoption of the Agenda**

9. The provisional agenda of the meeting was considered and adopted by the Bureau members as contained in annex I of this report.

### **IV. Timeline for a successful CRIC 19 session**

10. The secretariat presented to the Bureau members a timeline of activities that would lead up to CRIC 19 and COP 15. The scenario presented included a virtual session of CRIC 19 to be convened from 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2021 over the period of five working days with two hours virtual meetings every day. The secretariat clarified that a decision on the format of the forthcoming session is needed to ensure proper planning and to provide sufficient time for Parties to engage in discussions and exchange of information prior to the session.
11. The secretariat also provided an overview of the forthcoming meeting of the COP Bureau in mid-November or early December during which it will be briefed about the decision made by the CRIC Bureau in consultation with the Executive Secretary. Should the COP Bureau meeting endorse the proposal to plan for a virtual meeting, it is envisaged to start sending official communications soon afterwards to Parties that would ensure engagement and buy-in from all Parties.
12. Going through the tentative timeline of activities leading up to CRIC 19 as contained in annex 2 of this report, the secretariat highlighted again that a number of communications may be needed to explain to Parties the differences caused by the change of format, including the important role that regional consultations will play in this context. It also added that in mid-December, a website will be opened allowing Parties to see and review documentation for CRIC 19 especially the conclusions and recommendations sections of the said documents that will look similar to draft texts for negotiations. The secretariat further explained that this shift in format of the conclusions and recommendations section is in compliance with decision 32/COP.14 which requests the secretariat to circulate a single document with all draft decisions prepared for Parties for consideration at the COP. Starting with the final report of the intersessional session, it is hoped that draft decision text emerging from CRIC will be succinct and properly formatted and edited, to facilitate negotiations during sessions of the CRIC held in conjunction with COP.
13. The secretariat emphasized the importance of the role of the regional consultations for all the implementation annexes and interest groups during which three key objectives among others should be achieved: a) a thorough understanding of Parties of the substance to be discussed at CRIC 19, including draft conclusions and recommendations; b) the preparation of regional implementation annexes and interest groups in terms of spokespersons being appointed for the contact groups and key statements to be delivered as part of the plenary sessions. The idea behind appointing spokespersons for the contact group that will speak on behalf of regions and/or interest groups, where appropriate, is that the contact group may work smoothly through the draft text by receiving concise and concrete suggestions from regions that have been discussed and agreed upon previously. This however, does not negate any Party to attend the contact group as per past tradition established by Parties within the UNCCD and provide their own input to the final report of CRIC; c) forming regional views and opinions leading to input to the draft conclusions and recommendations.
14. The CRIC Chair thanked the secretariat for elaborating on the process that would need to be adopted by the CRIC Bureau for a virtual CRIC 19 session. Members raised two concerns: a) stable internet connectivity in relation to the session and in relation to commenting on draft conclusions and recommendations and documents in general; b) time difference between



different annexes, particularly between countries of the Asia implementation annex, that could exceed 12 hours which makes exchanging information more complex and difficult.

15. The secretariat acknowledged that a virtual meeting would differ from a face-to-face meeting and that results may probably be much easier achieved when participants in a contact group would meet face to face. However, the secretariat noted that it had taken into consideration current realities relating to COVID-19, which also have been recognized by Bureau members, and looked very carefully at the experiences of other entities that have held virtual sessions and is trying to build on the positive outcomes that those meeting have generated. Regarding the process of providing comments on draft conclusions and recommendations the secretariat assured the CRIC Bureau members that every effort would be made to ensure that documents will be downloadable and that comments from Parties could be uploaded with ease. The secretariat also noted that interpretation will be available during plenary meetings of the CRIC even if held virtually. Regarding the issue of time difference, the secretariat informed the Bureau that one session per day of 2 hours is foreseen that will ensure that all Parties, irrespective of their location could participate in plenary meetings as well as the contact groups.

## V. CRIC 19 Agenda

16. The secretariat briefed the CRIC Bureau on how the CRIC session would be designed if held virtually. This includes that the secretariat intends to hold the session from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2021, so a total of 5 working days of which 3 days will be dedicated to plenary meetings followed by 2 days of contact groups and one plenary meeting, during which the final report will be adopted. The secretariat also noted that the daily online meetings (plenary and/or contact groups) would last for 2 hours from 12:30 to 14:30 Bonn time and will be supported by United Nations Office in Geneva (UNOG). The secretariat noted that interpretation will be provided during the plenary meetings but not during the contact group.
17. Taking the proposed timing of CRIC meetings into consideration, the secretariat proposed a skeleton of the CRIC 19 Agenda which was adapted from its previous version as endorsed by the Bureau members. Notably, if CRIC 19 is held virtually, the secretariat proposed deferring two agenda items to CRIC 20 which will be held in conjunction with COP 15<sup>1</sup>.
18. The Bureau thanked the secretariat for the detailed proposal presented and applauded its efforts in rising and adapting to the COVID 19 situation. The CRIC Bureau however expressed a concern about the envisaged shortened contact groups during the proposed virtual session. The secretariat provided further explanations noting that the pre-session documents, which will include recommendations that look very much like draft text for negotiations, will be posted early enough for regions to discuss among themselves before and during the regional consultations. With considerable effort to allow for prior exchange among regions that can form opinions and followed by the contact group, it is hoped that Parties would be able to reach consensus on the recommendation section of the final report CRIC 19.
19. The secretariat also explained that this exceptional virtual session of CRIC would also require flexibility from and goodwill by Parties. On its part, the CRIC Bureau responded by acknowledging the exceptional nature of holding a virtual CRIC session and that Convention process needs to continue even during these challenging times to achieve whatever could be achieved, even if little, using the tools that are available. In the same vein, the Bureau placed

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<sup>1</sup> Agenda item on: Development and promotion of activities for targeted capacity-building to further the implementation of the Convention and agenda item: The reporting and review process of the UNCCD: Procedures for communication of information as well as the quality and formats of reports to be submitted to the Conference of the Parties.



much hope on the ongoing global efforts towards developing a vaccine and combat COVID 19 to enable return to normal and physical meetings.

20. Regarding the regional consultations which will be held before the CRIC session, the Bureau members asked if meetings will also be organized for the sub-regions especially if they are dispersed including the challenges posed by the different time zones. The secretariat confirmed that it will do its utmost to support meetings, where necessary, not only the implementation annexes but also of other interest groups and sub-regions.
21. After the Chair sought a motion from members, the Bureau members unanimously expressed their endorsement to hold CRIC 19 virtually and gave the secretariat the authority to proceed with finalising the agenda and all preparatory steps for a virtual CRIC session as proposed.

**VI. Any other matter**

22. Members of the CRIC Bureau thanked the secretariat for organizing the meeting and expressed again its warm welcome for Ms. Tina Birmpili for joining the secretariat as Deputy Executive Secretary and looked forward to her contributions to the Convention.



## **Annex I**

# **CRIC Bureau Meeting**

Bonn, Germany

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**Date:** 29 October 2020

**Venue:** E-meeting

**Working languages:** English

**Working hours:** 3.30 Bonn time

### **- PROVISIONAL ANNOTATED AGENDA FOR THE CRIC BUREAU MEETING -**

#### **Note by the secretariat**

- I. Welcoming remarks by the CRIC Chair**
- II. Welcoming remarks by the Deputy Executive Secretary, Tina Birmpili**
- III. Adoption of the Agenda**

The provisional agenda of the meeting as presented in this document may be considered by the Bureau members with a view of amending/adopting it.

- IV. Timeline for a successful CRIC 19 meeting**

The secretariat will provide to Bureau members a status update on preparations made for the nineteenth session of the CRIC (CRIC 19), including the option to convene CRIC virtually. Due to the exceptional circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the scenario of a virtual CRIC is becoming more and more likely. For planning purposes, a decision is needed to allow the Convention institutions to prepare adequately and allow Parties to engage into substantive debates during, but also prior to the session. This agenda item seeks an endorsement by the CRIC Bureau to convene CRIC 19 virtually on an exceptional basis.

- V. CRIC 19 agenda**

Following from the endorsement by the CRIC Bureau to convene CRIC 19 virtually, the secretariat is presenting to Bureau members an updated CRIC 19 agenda that takes into consideration technical limitations, time difference, and procedural elements that impact the virtual session. The updated CRIC 19 agenda will be shared with the CRIC Bureau members prior to the meeting but sufficient time will be made available to discuss in detail the substantive coverage of the session as well as the formats of meetings. This agenda item seeks an endorsement by the CRIC Bureau of the updated CRIC 19 agenda so that it can be submitted for further processing to UNOG.

- VI. Any other matter**

The Bureau members may wish to raise any other issue that they deem important and which would require action by the Bureau or the Convention institutions.

- VII. Wrap up and closing remarks by Tina Birmpili, Deputy Executive Secretary**

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## Annex II

### **Proposed timeline for activities leading up to CRIC 19 and COP 15<sup>2</sup>**

October	29.10	CRIC Bureau meeting
November	Mid Nov	COP Bureau notified about CRIC 19
	End Nov	Official notification to Parties on CRIC 19
December	3.12	Official communication to Parties explaining how CRIC 19 will work
	Mid Dec	Official documentation for CRIC available, including draft recommendations for each agenda item
January	2 <sup>nd</sup> – 4 <sup>th</sup> week	Regional consultations, consultations of interest groups
February	Mid Feb	Compilation of comments and feedback on draft recommendations made available to all Parties
March	15-19	CRIC 19
October	Mid Oct	Draft texts for negotiations compiled and published on the UNCCD website
December		COP 15/CRIC 20

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<sup>2</sup> This timeline may need to be periodically updated up until the planning phase for the virtual session will have been concluded