United Nations
Convention to Combat
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Report on the virtual meeting of the Bureau of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) (17 May 2021)

I. Welcoming remarks by the CRIC Chair

1. Mr. Andrew Bishop (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 constraining the Bureau in fully discharging its mandate and forcing it to meet virtually. However, he also noted that those constraints will not hinder him nor the rest of the Bureau rising above the challenge and continuing to service the CRIC process towards a successful in-session CRIC 20. He thanked all the Bureau members for attending this meeting and the secretariat for facilitating it.

II. Welcoming remarks by the Deputy Executive Secretary

2. The Deputy Executive Secretary, Ms Tina Birmpili welcomed the Bureau members and wished them good health while navigating through a rough time, especially in some regions where people suffer disproportionately from the COVID-19 situation.

3. She also extended personal greetings to those Bureau members that celebrated Eid Al Fitr during the week preceding the meeting. She thanked again Mr. Ahmet Senyaz from Turkey for his very able handing of the CRIC 19 session (held online from 15-19 March 2021) as acting Chair. She also thanked Mr. Hussein Nasrallah from Lebanon for an excellent job as rapporteur for being instrumental in creating a sound record of everything that was said during the session. The Deputy Executive Secretary further warmly welcomed again the Chair who is known to many people of the secretariat as former focal point for Guyana and now the new Chair of the CRIC.

4. Moving forward, the Deputy Executive Secretary highlighted that now that CRIC 19 has passed, collective efforts to need to concentrate on the next steps leading to the CRIC 20 sessional session which is held back-to-back with COP. She noted that the sessions of the UNCCD are still affected by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, she mentioned that the COP Bureau during its last meeting decided to postpone COP 15 to any time in between May and October next year (2022) in order to ensure that Parties to the UNCCD can meet face-to-face and in a normal setting to conduct their business.

Once a decision on the date has been set by the COP Bureau, Parties will be duly notified.

5. Since meetings of the COPs are linked to the sessional session of the CRIC, the Deputy Executive Secretary invited CRIC Bureau members to assess this situation and to consider the implication that this postponement may have on the reporting process. She noted that the secretariat will provide the Bureau members with the possible timelines of the reporting in relation to the dates that COP15 may take place.

6. Wrapping up the Deputy Executive Secretary highlighted that the secretariat will also provide to the CRIC Bureau information on the process of how draft decisions will be prepared from the final report of CRIC 19.

7. The Deputy Executive Secretary noted that she is looking forward to listening to the exchanges of the Bureau and its recommendations and reassured the members that the secretariat stands ready to support the Bureau in its work.

III. Adoption of the agenda

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

IV. Debriefing on CRIC 19

9. The CRIC Chair provided a brief on the convening of the CRIC 19 and mentioned that participation was high and remained high throughout the session. He also said that there was great interest and demand for the floor with many interventions on the LDN target setting process and transformative projects, the LDN Fund and the interim report of the IWG.

10. He noted that experience sharing was supposed to take center stage which he believed was achieved on the LDN target setting process and maybe to a lesser extent on the drought initiative. Pointing out the differences in the agenda items, he stated that the more political type discussion on the Interim report of the Intergovernmental working group on drought was expected. Overall, he was satisfied and thanked the secretariat for the work in facilitating this very special session.

11. The CRIC Chair briefed the Bureau on the comments received from the COP Bureau. He pointed out a lack of interactivity during the session and the limitation of time (2 hours per day) which he said were due to the constraints we are experiencing currently.

12. One CRIC Bureau member pointed out that the time allocated to the CRIC 19 session was limited when comparing it to the requests coming from the floor. In addition, the online nature of this CRIC did not help in creating interactive exchanges since the Chair ensured that the agenda item was introduced and then opened the floor for statements from Parties without being able to allow for question-and-answer sessions due to these peculiar circumstances. Therefore, real and adequate interactive debates were not taking place as expected.

13. The member also said that 3 minutes per statement was not sufficient to allow Parties to share experiences from the national level. On the positive side, he mentioned that CRIC 19 allowed Parties to keep in touch and ensure that important agenda items such as the issue of drought are on the minds of all Parties.

V. Update on official sessions of the COP and sessions of subsidiary bodies of the Convention

14. The CRIC Chair introduced the item by briefing the Bureau on the exchanges that were had during the last COP Bureau meeting. Emphasizing that all COP Bureau members agreed on having COP taking place as a face-to-face meeting, and unanimously decided that COP 15 will be postponed to a time in between the period of May and October 2022. Since the secretariat would still need to gather further information on different scenarios within the given timeframe, the COP Bureau decided to allow the Executive Secretary to further consult and report back to the next COP Bureau meeting with more concrete dates for COP 15.

15. The CRIC Chair also reiterated that the decision of when COP will take place is one that resides with the COP Bureau. However, since a COP session in 2022 will have an impact on reporting he requested the secretariat to briefly explain the reporting timeline in relationship to the decision to postpone the COP to 2022 in order for the CRIC Bureau members to provide feedback and/or recommendations.

16. The secretariat briefed the CRIC Bureau on the two scenarios and highlighted overlaps where COP and CRIC preparation could probably create additional work for either Parties and/or the Convention institutions.

17. (A question was responded to and a clarification was made that Parties during all intersessional sessions have always requested for more time for UNCCD reporting.) An alternative wording can be: "In response to a question by one member, the Secretariat clarified that Parties during intersessional periods have always requested more time to prepare and submit their reports."

18. One member emphasized that times have changed and that during a pandemic, Parties may encounter constraints to undertake reporting effectively therefore probably needing more time. He also said that having a COP in May might be a little bit challenging for Parties to finish and submit their reports.

19. Another member said that priority should be placed on getting the maximum amount of national reports submitted to the secretariat. If more time for reporting would enable them to do that, then this should be factored into the consideration when to schedule the sessions.

20. Another Bureau member reported that their group had already internally consulted on the postponement of COP and their preferred option would be to have COP in May and CRIC later in the year 2022 provided that documentation for CRIC 21 can be prepared in time. In wrapping up, the Chair highlighted again that the decision on the date and venue of the COP is one that falls under the jurisdiction of the COP Bureau.

VI. The way forward to CRIC 20, draft texts for negotiations emerging from CRIC 19

21. As part of this agenda item, the secretariat briefed the CRIC Bureau members on the process leading to draft decisions following CRIC 19 with the posting of the final report on the UNCCD website.

22. The secretariat also reminded the Bureau that in previous meetings it was already alluded to that draft texts for negotiations will be extracted from the final report. This time however and due to a decision of the COP (32.COP/14) the draft texts for all agenda items before CRIC 20 will be included in one fully fledged official document to be submitted to United Nations Office in Geneva (UNOG). As soon as the dates for COP 15 will have been set and internal planning on document preparation has been completed, the secretariat and the GM will start drafting texts for negotiations to be presented to a CRIC Bureau meeting. Once the Bureau has cleared those draft texts,

they will be included in the official document and processed like all the other official documents.

23. Since the COP 15 dates are pending, Bureau members decided that the secretariat will alert the Bureau on the process leading to the preparation of draft texts for negotiations in order to convene a CRIC Bureau in time for clearing those draft texts.

24. No further clarifications were requested

VII. Update on the 2021 – 2022 UNCCD reporting

25. The secretariat introduced the item through a series of presentations on the reporting platform, the methodological updates for strategic objectives 1 to 5, on capacity building and on the reporting timeline.

26. The need to present geospatial data to help countries track progress towards LDN Targets was discussed. The secretariat clarified that the SDG map for example would include improved as well as degraded areas to support a country's assessment of the likelihood to achieve its national voluntary LDN targets. The secretariat also informed the Bureau that the new PRAIS system will have a drawing tool which will allow a country Party to delineate areas of target commitments and/or areas of implemented actions thereby assisting in reporting on LDN Targets.

27. The resolution of default data was discussed in the context of mountainous regions. The Bureau pointed out that the resolution has been too coarse in the past for mountainous countries to report accurately. The same issue has been highlighted by Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The Bureau acknowledged, however, that while there are initiatives to make global land cover maps at higher resolution (10m) available for free to the public, they are not yet operational and data providers have so far not produced global data sets at higher resolutions covering the entire time period under assessment for reporting purposes (i.e. from 2000 onwards). Accordingly, it was agreed that the global default data resolution will be the same for this reporting round and the secretariat will continue to promote the need for higher resolution data for reporting.

28. The need to account for populations affected by land degradation in reporting was raised and it was clarified that there will be new indicators on populations exposed to land degradation and drought. The methodology for estimating exposed populations

involves a spatial overlap of the land degradation and population maps and therefore assumes that a population present on degraded land is exposed.

29. With regards to a question raised about how technology transfer will be measured under Strategic Objective 5, the secretariat pointed out to the difficulty in finding data and clarified that the methodology that will be used in the upcoming 2021 - 2022 reporting process will look at how much money is flowing into technology transfers by counting different kinds of agreements, thus arriving at trends.

30. In addition to the above, two suggestions for future work on reporting were made by the Bureau:

    a. The first is to quantify soil degradation by overlapping a soil type map on the land degradation map as it would be interesting to see if degradation is correlated with a particular soil type and such knowledge and analyses could have a tremendous impact on, for instance, agricultural potential.
    b. The second suggestion is to use the spatial overlap method to investigate if land degradation can be correlated to the occurrence of drought.

31. Regarding capacity development for reporting, the CRIC Bureau agreed with the approach for online capacity building for the 2021-2022 UNCCD reporting. In terms of providing e-learning and follow-on training to country Parties on the new reporting platform, the Bureau, anticipating further complexity in reporting due to the mandated developments introduced, suggested that the training be carried out over a longer time period, covering all strategic objectives with dedicated modules for each Strategic Objective. Previously there were only 4 days of training given across all reporting which Bureau members found to most likely not be sufficient in the upcoming 2021–2022 reporting process. The Bureau also requested the secretariat to ensure that as in previous years, a functioning helpdesk in addition to online capacity building webinars be made available to Parties after the launching of the PRAIS 4 platform.

32. In this regard, the secretariat assured Bureau members that the process of quality assurance will be done by the secretariat, with the help of consultants who will be recruited for this exercise, which can also be seen as part of capacity development.

33. The secretariat also stressed that it is open to receiving suggestions on new ways and new means to support the Parties in reporting and that this could also be done after the Bureau meeting.

34. Further, the CRIC Bureau requested the secretariat to communicate on issues relating to the umbrella projects initiated by UNEP for the disbursements of enabling funding.

35. As for the reporting timeline, the points raised under agenda item V would be conveyed to the COP Bureau.

VIII. Identification of action items to be brought to the next COP Bureau meeting

36. The following issues will be incorporated in the report of the CRIC Chair to the forthcoming COP Bureau meeting:

On the agenda item relating to COP 15:

- While it is clear that the question on when COP 15 will take place falls under the jurisdiction of the COP Bureau, it is important to note that rescheduling COP to 2022 may have an impact on the reporting process and the review by the CRIC on information submitted to the secretariat.

- It is also understood that Parties at COP 15 will take a decision on the time of the intersessional session of the CRIC which will review information from the reports submitted.

- Some CRIC Bureau members were of the view that Parties would benefit from a longer reporting period. Reference was made to the pandemic and the increased complexity of reporting and how this may delay some Parties in submitting their report by the deadline that will be set.

- Following consultations that have already been undertaken in the Central and Eastern European annex, its CRIC Bureau member informed the meeting that their group would opt for COP 15 to take place in May and CRIC by the end of 2022 if all reports can be analyzed during the five months indicated in this slide.

On the agenda item relating to UNCCD reporting:

- Resolution of default data remains the same since data providers have so far not produced global data sets at higher resolutions covering the entire time period under assessment for

reporting purposes (i.e. from 2000 onwards). The secretariat will continue to promote the need for higher resolution data for reporting.

- The CRIC Bureau agreed with the approach for online capacity building for the 2021-2022 UNCCD reporting and requested the secretariat to ensure that a functioning helpdesk in addition to online capacity building webinars be made available to Parties after the launching of the PRAIS 4 platform and that all strategic objectives be covered in the capacity building activities.

- The CRIC Bureau further requested the secretariat to communicate on issues relating to the umbrella projects initiated by UNEP for the disbursements of enabling funding.

IX. Any other matter

37. The CRIC Bureau decided that since the next CRIC Bureau meeting will need to consider draft texts for negotiations to be included as part of the official CRIC 20 documentation, the secretariat will inform the CRIC Bureau on potential dates once the COP 15 date and venue will have been decided upon.

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Annex I- List of participants

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Annex II - Agenda of the CRIC Bureau meeting

1. Welcoming remarks by the CRIC Chair
2. Welcoming remarks by the Deputy Executive Secretary
3. Adoption of the Agenda
4. Debriefing on CRIC 19
5. Update on official sessions of the COP and sessions of subsidiary bodies of the Convention
6. The way forward to CRIC 20, draft texts for negotiations emerging from CRIC 19
7. Update on the 2021 – 2022 UNCCD reporting
8. Identification of action items to be brought to the next COP Bureau meeting
9. Any other matter