

Decision 23/COP.5

Report on the fourth Round Table of Parliamentarians

The Conference of the Parties,

Having heard the presentation of the Declaration of Members of Parliament regarding the process of implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, made by Honorable Mr. Girigissou Gado, Deputy, National Assembly of Benin, reporting on the outcome of the fourth Round Table of Parliamentarians, which took place at Geneva on 4 and 5 October 2001, and in which 26 Parliamentarians from 26 countries participated,

1. *Takes note* with appreciation of the Declaration;
2. *Decides* to include the Declaration as an annex to the report of the Conference of the Parties on its fifth session.

*9th plenary meeting
10 October 2001*

Annex

DECLARATION BY MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

*Fourth Round Table of Members of Parliament
Geneva, 4-5 October 2001
in parallel with the fifth Conference of the Parties to
the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification*

**The role of members of parliament in addressing the interlinkages
between poverty and sustainable development, particularly
desertification, within the framework of the implementation
of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification**

I. *We, members of parliament*, meeting in Geneva on 4 and 5 October 2001 for the fourth Round Table at the invitation of the Convention secretariat, with the full support of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the assistance of the Government of Switzerland, in the sidelines of the fifth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa,

Deeply concerned by the persistent trends of desertification worldwide, particularly in the fragile ecosystems of developing countries' economies,

Aware of the enormous losses generated by this large-scale phenomenon and its direct consequences for global equilibrium, particularly insofar as it relates to food production and availability, disruption of traditional migration flows, and human security,

Conscious of the global threat that lies in the continuous degradation of the land that sustains us,

Mindful of the direct causality links existing between land degradation and poverty which generate vicious circles of land over-exploitation by increasingly deprived communities,

Bearing in mind the increasing deprivation suffered by poor people in terms of social, economic, environmental and cultural services and opportunities,

Recalling the warning of the Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme regarding the risk of producing a "world gargantuan in its excess, grotesque in its human and economic inequalities" if the imbalance in economic growth continues,

Conscious that not all the economic growth is beneficial when it embraces policies leading to development that is jobless (creates unemployment), ruthless (benefits on the rich to the exclusion of the poor), voiceless (suppresses democratic expression), rootless (destroys links to community and culture) and futureless (destroys the planetary support system),

Declare that:

1. We are deeply alarmed by the increasing environmental degradation, particularly desertification, that has now reached such magnitude that it threatens the very basis of life on Earth.

2. We are greatly concerned by the continuous losses in productivity of the first sector, which still constitutes the main source of revenue for the economies of the majority of developing countries.

3. We are seriously worried by clear and sustained data indicating that desertification processes severely undermine sustainable economic growth, limit food security and exacerbate susceptibility to famine, often accompanied by large-scale movements of displaced people and by armed conflicts.

4. We are conscious of the fact that the established trends in terms of natural resources exploitation as well as the current patterns of consumption have by far exceeded the earth's carrying capacities.

5. We are convinced that addressing the issue of poverty eradication, particularly widespread environment-induced poverty and its tragic consequences in terms of macro-social disruptions, must be conceived as a total priority of integrated international policy schemes towards the promotion of sustainable development.

6. We are persuaded of the necessity to declare the land that feeds us, and particularly what is known as its topsoil layer, as a common human patrimony requiring imperative, urgent, concerted and worldwide protection.

7. We firmly believe that public policies should be clearly oriented towards addressing the root causes of poverty through participative and democratic processes leading to a real and efficient empowerment of communities, especially women, at the front line of the sustainable development struggle.

8. We underline our conviction that growth can not constitute an objective per se and should therefore be accompanied by social regulatory mechanisms which ensure an equitable redistribution of wealth amongst all, which address the issue of land tenure and which guarantee access to education in order to empower poor people and allow them to realise their potential, and in order to reduce their vulnerability to exogenous pressures.

9. We recognize that prevailing macro-economic policies have great impacts on the processes of impoverishment, and we call therefore upon developed countries, in conformity with the letter and spirit of the Convention, to take appropriate actions aimed at relieving the current burden of developing countries, particularly through the promotion of economic reforms aimed at combining growth with human development, equity and social justice by, *inter alia*:

- Agreeing on the relief of external debt,
- Reducing interest rates,
- Improving the overall trading environment.

II. In affirming our commitment, as members of parliament, to contribute fully to the implementation of the Convention, we note with appreciation that the international community in its wisdom has decided to address the urgent issue of UNCCD funding, particularly by defining ways and means of identifying reliable and centralized multilateral financial mechanisms in order to ensure that affected developing country Parties to the Convention dispose of the required financial predictability essential to their economic planning and policy formulation.

In this regard:

10. We fully support the decision of the last Governing Council of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) held in Washington D.C. in May 2001, which requested the Chief Executive Officer "to explore the best options for enhancing the support of the GEF in assisting affected countries, especially those in Africa, to implement the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, taking into account the third replenishment of the GEF".

11. We further agree with the GEF Governing Council that addressing the issue of land degradation is an integral part of the pursuit of sustainable development, poverty alleviation and synergism amongst the global environmental conventions. We consequently praise the GEF Council for agreeing that the designation of land degradation (desertification and deforestation) as a GEF focal area should be pursued, as a means for enhancing GEF support for the successful implementation of the UNCCD.

12. We strongly request the country Parties to the Convention to designate the GEF as the operational financial mechanism of the UNCCD, in order to provide it with the predictable financial resources which will enable it to achieve its objectives in a timely and efficient manner.

13. Accordingly, we further request the GEF, at its next Assembly meeting in Beijing, China, in 2002, to make desertification a fully fledged GEF focal area along with biodiversity, climate change, the protection of the ozone layer and international waters.

14. We firmly believe that all major environmental issues are intrinsically linked and require a concerted international effort to address them synergistically. Particular emphasis should be placed on building up a culture of synergism in the implementation of the different legally binding sustainable development instruments at the field level.

15. We fully support all initiatives which aim at encouraging sustainable development promotion in order to ensure the best use of financial and human resources and the effective use of available expertise and comparative advantages, including traditional knowledge, in both developed and developing countries as well as the public and private sectors.

16. We request all presiding officers to take steps to publicise the present declaration by placing it on the agenda of their national parliaments or by bringing it to the attention of all members of their parliament in some other appropriate way.

III. Finally, we request the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, with the assistance of the Inter-Parliamentary Union:

17. To take all necessary measures to bring the present declaration to the attention of the world leaders at the forthcoming meeting of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in September 2002.

18. To organize the next Round Table of members of parliament in conjunction with the sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention;

19. To take follow-up action on the decisions of the present round table and to develop strategies in order to achieve universal awareness of the declarations and progress reports of the parliamentary round table process.