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URGENT ACTION FOR AFRICA AND INTERIM MEASURES IN OTHER REGIONS:
COMPILATION OF INFORMATION

Note by the Secretariat

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. At the same time as adopting the text of the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD) at its fifth session in Paris (6 to 17 June 1994), the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for Desertification (INCD) adopted resolution 5/1 on urgent action for Africa and resolution 5/2 on interim arrangements.

2. In the resolution on urgent action for Africa, the INCD:

- (a) invited affected African countries to take urgent steps to prepare national and subregional action programmes or to review and improve them, as appropriate;
- (b) asked developed countries to provide support to the affected African countries;
- (c) requested international and multilateral organizations to provide support and mobilize necessary resources;
- (d) recommended that affected African countries designate coordinating bodies at the regional and subregional levels;
- (e) also recommended the establishment, at the national and subregional levels, of partnership arrangements with relevant developed countries; and
- (f) requested the Interim Secretariat (the Secretariat) to facilitate the implementation of the resolution.

3. In the resolution on interim measures, the INCD invited States and regional economic integration organizations entitled to sign the Convention to communicate to the Secretariat information regarding measures taken consistent with the provisions of the CCD pending its entry into force.

4. Following the fifth session, part of the agenda of each subsequent INCD session was devoted to a review of actions taken to implement these two resolutions. Summaries of these discussions by the Chairman of the INCD are to be found in the relevant reports on the sessions, namely A/50/47, A/50/74/Add. 1, A/51/76, A/51/76/Add.1 and A/52/82. Additional documents on the actions are contained in the compilations in:

- (a) documents A/AC.241/30 and Add.1 and A/AC.241/40, and
- (b) documentation on extrabudgetary funds including A/AC.241/31, A/AC.241/41 and Add.1, A/AC.241/52 and Add.1, A/AC.241/59, A/AC.241/69 and ICCD/COP(1)/4 and Add.1.

5. This present note provides a general report briefly highlighting actions which the Secretariat was requested to support for the implementation of the two resolutions, encompassing the period from the time of their adoption to the date of this note. Such support, either direct financial support or technical support through the participation of staff of the Secretariat, was undertaken generally through contributions to the Trust Fund established under General Assembly Resolution 47/188. In many cases, the actions involved national, subregional or regional meetings, a list of which is contained in the Annex.

6. In general, countries of all four of the CCD's regional implementation annexes made considerable progress on the elaboration of national, subregional and regional action programmes and the Secretariat facilitated initiatives at all of those levels. As might be expected, however, the results varied somewhat from country to country, subregion to subregion and region to region.

7. Initial governmental actions on a national level in any region generally involved the designation of national focal points, establishment of national coordinating committees and the holding of national awareness seminars (also known as national awareness days).

8. These seminars spread awareness of the CCD among decision makers in concerned ministries, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and representatives of local authorities and communities. They also gave significant support to the lead ministries, or the national focal points in charge of CCD implementation, as they strengthened national consensus on the CCD's approaches and implementation modalities. While the response by participants was invariably positive, further efforts were inevitably necessary to:

- (a) secure synergy with various strategic planning frameworks for sustainable development;
- (b) fully involve national budget and finance authorities;
- (c) emphasize the required participatory approach at the local level; and
- (d) involve international partners in an ongoing dialogue for the elaboration of the national action programme.

9. There was also a common pattern that emerged in NGO activities at all levels in different regions, often consisting of many of the following features:

- (a) NGO efforts were usually based on the action plan developed by the global NGO network, known by its French acronym as RIOD, at a workshop in Ouagadougou in November 1994.
- (b) NGOs initiated forums to raise awareness of the Convention and the RIOD action plan, as well as to discuss modalities for coordinating national activities, while emphasizing the need for stronger local and community level participation.
- (c) They also established national NGO focal points and encouraged dialogue among NGOs, and between NGOs and governments, sometimes based on formal communication structures.
- (d) They organized events at the national and local level to celebrate June 17 as World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought.
- (e) They emphasized the role of women in the implementation of the Convention, as well as the importance of financing local community action through national desertification funds and similar devices.
- (f) They exchanged information at the subregional and regional levels through designated focal points, as well as holding subregional and regional forums resulting in recommendations to governments.
- (g) They participated in, and met among themselves at, the various subregional and regional meetings discussed below. They also held a meeting in Hyderabad in December 1996 to encourage NGO partnerships across regions in the developing world.

II. URGENT ACTION IN AFRICA

10. At the *national* level, over 30 countries in the African region have organized national awareness days with the assistance of the Secretariat. In addition to the comments generally applicable to the holding of awareness days, it is noteworthy that most concerned countries are pursuing efforts to sensitize a wide audience to the issue of combating desertification, not only at the national level but at provincial and local levels as well. Two countries have already reached the stage of a first "national forum." In some other countries, the participative and consultative processes initiated could lead soon to this important session, which can only stem from a long preparatory approach aimed at involving all major actors, particularly at the community level.

11. Those countries that already held national forums gained a consensus on the main lines of a national action programme and on the remaining steps to elaborate it. It is proving difficult, however, for them to involve international partners in the process, looking toward the partnership arrangements emphasized in the Convention. Since such arrangements are essential to implementing national action programmes, their initiation should now be a major focus.

12. On the *subregional level*, as indicated in the Annex, all four subregions of Africa have met frequently to discuss elaborating subregional action programmes and to undertake measures to support national action programmes. Among other significant events were subregional meetings of national focal points held at Nouakchott and Asmara, both of which allowed a useful exchange of experiences.

13. The following is a brief summary of the results achieved by member governments in each subregion:

- (a) The joint processes of the Permanent Inter-State Council for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was launched in Dakar in July 1995 and strengthened in a meeting at Lome in February 1996. The Lome session set three objectives to be met during deliberations in Niamey in July 1997: determining and agreeing on the priorities of a subregional action programme for West Africa, defining the methodology and timing for elaborating the activities of the programme and settling its coordination, funding and assessment mechanisms. The Niamey meeting should thus give decisive impetus to the West African subregional action programme.
- (b) The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) process led to a series of recommendations aimed at facilitating the elaboration of a subregional action programme for East Africa, as well as its harmonization with ongoing IGAD projects and with national action programmes being prepared in the subregion. IGAD member States agreed that their subregional programme should focus on priority areas, such as capacity building, to ensure the success of the implementation process. They also stressed the importance of issues related to livestock, pastoralism and the nomadic sector, which figure greatly in the economic and social development of the subregion.
- (c) The Southern African Development Community (SADC) process recommended a draft subregional action programme for approval by its Council of Ministers. This programme addresses, in accordance with the CCD, social and economic issues related to desertification. It also designates organizations responsible for capacity building and training, and sets priorities for necessary actions to be undertaken.
- (d) The Arab Maghreb Union (UMA) process began with a meeting in Rabat in October 1994 but slackened after a second meeting in Tunis at the end of 1995. UMA experts came together in April 1997 at the organization's Rabat headquarters to invigorate the process. They discussed a proposal aimed at building UMA's capacity to coordinate the subregional process in North Africa, particularly through establishment of a dedicated coordination unit. They also recommended a work programme for this unit. A regional forum later in 1997 is expected to approve the expert recommendations.

14. At the *regional level*, the Pan-African conference held in Ouagadougou from 18 to 21 March 1997 constituted an important step in the implementation of the CCD in Africa. In a ministerial declaration from that Conference, African environment ministers reaffirmed their determination to honour engagements undertaken at the Rio Summit, in particular with respect to the CCD. The Conference also approved the establishment of a regional co-ordination unit responsible for facilitating the elaboration of a regional action programme, and invited African countries to put in place a regional facilitation fund.

III. INTERIM MEASURES IN ASIA

15. At the *national* level, awareness seminars were held in 13 Asian countries. In addition, the Secretariat supported the provision of institutional support in Mongolia.

16. Subregional and interregional gatherings also showed substantial progress:

- (a) *Subregional* initiatives in Western Asia fostered cooperation through meetings in Bahrain and Abu Dhabi. These gatherings contributed to building political support for the CCD and to reviewing related national priorities in the Arab world. A later meeting in Damascus explored options for cooperation among such institutions as The Arab Centre for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD), International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) and Centre for Environment and Development for Arab Region and Europe (CEDARE).
- (b) An *interregional* conference in Tashkent, covering the Eurasian land mass, provided fresh impetus for international cooperation to combat land degradation and identified a number of areas that could be incorporated in a forthcoming interregional action programme. Interest was also expressed in transboundary cooperation in the management of natural resources.
- (c) A conference in Almaty identified fourteen specific areas for cooperation among countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, notably including water resource utilization in international river basins, networking of protected areas and coordination of research and monitoring.

17. Asian countries were also active at the *regional* level, where a series of meetings greatly strengthened cooperation among Asian countries. The following were the highlights:

- (a) Initial meetings identified as priorities information collection, analysis and exchanges, research and development, transfer of technology, capacity-building, education and public awareness.
- (b) Important NGO meetings in Islamabad and Hyderabad spelled out the role that NGOs should play in the CCD implementation process in Asia.
- (c) The Regional Conference on the Implementation of the CCD in New Delhi, started to define more precisely the scope and content of a regional action programme (RAP) to combat desertification in Asia and listed cross-cutting issues that would be reviewed under various themes. It decided that the RAP would be gradually developed through networking arrangements facilitated by competent institutions in the region.
- (d) A Regional Ministerial Conference in Beijing provided important guidelines to strengthen regional cooperation across Asia in the years to come. It endorsed the preparation of a regional action programme and identified initial areas for thematic cooperation, including hosting by China and India respectively of the networks for desertification monitoring and assessment and for agroforestry and soil conservation. It also mandated the continuation of regional cooperation initiatives and invited international organizations to provide financial and technical support to the preparation of the regional action programme.

IV. INTERIM MEASURES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

18. At the *national* level, a number of countries initiated preparation of national action programmes, and designated national focal points. In some cases, there have also been more specific joint activities, such as the preparation by Argentina and Chile of a project on desertification in Patagonia. Ten countries have held national awareness days.

19. In addition, countries in Latin America and the Caribbean are developing activities in both the regional and subregional context, taking into account different levels of perception and knowledge of the challenge of desertification. The impact of land degradation is now better understood in the region but it requires further analysis and dissemination of information regarding losses in productivity and economic and social impacts, including effects of migration patterns and the implications for local climate patterns.

20. At the *subregional* level, a meeting held in early 1996 in the Dominican Republic concentrated on the fragility of island ecosystems in the Caribbean region and underlined the need for subregional coordination. In addition, five countries of the subregion agreed to establish a subregional action plan for the sustainable development of the Puna Americana region of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador and Peru.

21. At the *regional* level, three meetings saw significant progress in the identification of common problems and of ways to solve them:

- (a) The first regional meeting in Buenos Aires highlighted the necessity to strengthen regional coordination.
- (b) The second in Mexico City identified specific areas of cooperation for Latin American and Caribbean countries.
- (c) The third conference in Havana decided on the establishment of a regional coordinating mechanism for the implementation of the CCD. As a follow-up to this activity, a letter of understanding was signed in June 1997 by the Government of Mexico, the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Office of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP/ROLAC) and the Secretariat to support the launching of the regional coordinating unit. At Havana, countries of the region also decided to approve a regional action programme, which included *inter alia* support for a common approach to the Gran Chaco Americano region of Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay, for combating desertification in the Hispaniola ecosystem and for the further development of an information network and of indicators to monitor land degradation in the region.

V. INTERIM MEASURES IN THE NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN

22. At the *national* level, in many countries, core ministries responsible for CCD implementation are dealing with the institutional aspects of inter-ministerial coordination while launching information campaigns to ensure broad cross-sectoral coverage of CCD activities. National action programmes are also being prepared.

23. In a *regional* context, there has also been a variety of activities, including seven regional meetings, involving, at various times, government officials, non-governmental organizations and the scientific community. Initially, a study group was set up to promote regional forums, stimulate a bottom-up approach consistent with the CCD, disseminate scientific data and analyses, inventory relevant national programmes and establish information links. This process of coordination and reflection culminated in agreement at Murcia in May 1997 to:

- (a) jointly promote the implementation of relevant national action programmes;

- (b) encourage the expansion of joint action within the region, such as the Spain and Portugal "Montado" (cork oak) project and the development of common benchmarks and indicators;
- (c) share knowledge and experience with other regions, particularly the Southern Mediterranean and Latin America and the Caribbean;
- (d) improve communication networks among government and European Union administrations, NGOs, and the scientific and academic communities; and
- (e) work together to ensure that European Union programmes take a greater interest in desertification issues.

24. The Secretariat also worked with Northern Mediterranean countries to organize special thematic meetings on subjects such as the relationship between desertification and migration and methodologies for local area development. Finally, meetings of NGOs in Europe highlighted the need to share their experience with Southern NGOs and to involve the European Union more closely in the implementation of the Convention.

ANNEX

MAJOR NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND SUBREGIONAL
MEETINGS WITH SECRETARIAT INVOLVEMENT
FROM JUNE 1994 - JULY 1997

Africa**1994**

5-6 October	Rabat	International meeting on desertification in the Maghreb region
11-14 November	Ouagadougou	International NGO Meeting (RIOD)

1995

3-4 April	Praia	National Awareness Seminar in Cape Verde
20-22 April	Asmara	National Awareness Seminar in Eritrea
2-3 May	N'Djamena	National Awareness Seminar in Chad
11-13 May	Ouagadougou	National Awareness Seminar in Burkina Faso
20-22 May	Nouakchott	National Awareness Seminar in Mauritania
22-23 May	Cairo	National Awareness Seminar in Egypt
1-2 June	Addis Ababa	National Awareness Seminar in Ethiopia
6-7 June	Dakar	National Awareness Seminar in Senegal
13-14 June	Cotonou	National Awareness Seminar in Benin
14-15 June	Rabat	National Awareness Seminar in Morocco
17-19 June	Niamey	National Awareness Seminar in Niger
22-23 June	Lusaka	National Awareness Seminar in Zambia
4-6 July	Khartoum	National Awareness Seminar in Sudan
12-14 July	Kampala	National Awareness Seminar in Uganda
24-28 July	Dakar	Subregional consultation for the implementation of the CCD in Western Africa
1-3 August	Asmara	Subregional consultation for the implementation of the CCD in Eastern Africa

28-29 September	Abidjan	National Awareness Seminar in Cote d'Ivoire
18-19 October	Conakry	National Awareness Seminar in Guinea
8-11 November	Tunis	Subregional consultation for the implementation of the CCD in Northern Africa
13-15 November	Lome	National Awareness Seminar in Togo
13-15 November	Praia	Forum for formulation of National Action Programme
14-15 November	Dar-Es-Salaam	National Awareness Seminar in Tanzania
23-24 November	Harare	National Awareness Seminar in Zimbabwe
27-28 November	Pretoria	National Awareness Seminar in South Africa
1-2 December	Tunis	National Awareness Seminar in Tunisia

1996

16-18 January	Windhoek	Subregional consultation for the implementation of the CCD in Southern Africa
25-26 January	Luanda	National Awareness Seminar in Angola
30-31 January	Antananarivo	National Awareness Seminar in Madagascar
23-24 February	Lome	Launching of the joint elaboration of Subregional Action Programme of CILSS and ECOWAS member States
25 February	Yaounde	Mini Forum for NGOs
28 Feb.-1 March	Bamako	Forum for formulation of National Action Programme

28-30 March	Kairouan	International NGO Workshop - Partners Against Desertification
6-10 May	Banjul	National Awareness Seminar in Gambia
14-15 May	Maputo	National Awareness Seminar in Mozambique
19-21 May	Djibouti	National Awareness Seminar in Djibouti
21-22 May	Mbabane	National Awareness Seminar in Swaziland
28-31 May	Maroua	Central African NGO Meeting in Cameroon
29-31 May	Dakar	West African NGO Meeting
5-7 June	Rome	International forum on local area development in support of the CCD
10-15 June	Addis Ababa	Technical meeting on the priority areas of IGAD member States
17-20 June	Addis Ababa	East African NGO Meeting
24-28 June	Lisbon	Expert meeting on rehabilitation of degraded forest ecosystems affected by desertification
24-25 June	Accra	National Awareness Seminar in Ghana
31 July-2 August	Harare	Southern African NGO Meeting
24-26 July	Bangui	National Awareness Seminar in Central African Republic
5-11 August	Beijing	First Asia-Africa Forum on the implementation of the CCD
12-14 August	Banjul	Meeting on NAP methodology and on indicators of follow-up
20-22 August	Cotonou	Forum for formulation of National Action Programme
18-22 November	Nouakchott	First technical Workshop for African focal points for the CCD
16-17 December	Algiers	National Awareness Seminar in Algeria
1997		
19-21 February	Nairobi	Forum on the Subregional Action Programme for the IGAD member States
3-5 March	Maseru	Forum on the Subregional Action Programme for the SADC member States
18-21 March	Ouagadougou	Pan-African Conference on the implementation of the CCD
27-28 March	Nouakchott	NGO Forum
8-11 April	Praia	NGO Forum
14-16 April	Rabat	Meeting of experts from AMU member States
29 April-2 May	Asmara	Second Technical Workshop for African focal points for the CCD
5-7 May	Nouakchott	Meeting of the Government of Mauritania with its major partners for combating desertification
20-22 May	Cotonou	NGO Forum
28-29 May	Dakar	Forum for formulation of National Action Programme
23-27 June	Gaborone	Meeting on information systems for sustainable development
1-3 July	Ouagadougou	Seminar on the Global Environmental Facilities (GEF and FFEM) and the funding of actions to combat desertification
8-11 July	Ouagadougou	Forum for formulation of National Action Programme
21-23 July	Niamey	Forum on the Subregional Action Programme for West African countries(CILSS/ECOWAS)
2-5 September	Niamey	Second Asia-Africa Forum on the implementation of the CCD
2-10 September	Banjul	Summit meeting (Heads of State and Government) of CILSS member States
16-19 September	Maseru	Third Technical workshop for African focal points for the CCD
September (To be determined)		Forum on Subregional Action Programme of AMU member States

Asia**1996**

28-31 January	Islamabad	Asian Regional NGO Conference
11-12 March	Teheran	
	National Awareness Seminar in Iran	
16 March	Amman	Mid Term Workshop of Middle-East Joint Study
20-21 March	New Delhi	Preparatory Meeting for the Asia Regional Conference
26-28 March	Islamabad	National Awareness Seminar in Pakistan
7-10 May	Istanbul	International Consultation of Eurasian and Mediterranean countries
28-29 May	Amman	National Awareness Seminar in Jordan
12-17 June	Beijing	National Awareness Seminar in China
18 June	Bangkok	Substantive Review Meeting for the Asian Regional Conference
23-25 June	Abu Dhabi	Subregional consultation on the implementation of the CCD in Western Asia
5-11 August	Beijing	First Asia-Africa Forum on the implementation of the CCD
21-23 August	New Delhi	Regional Conference on the implementation of the CCD in Asia
22-25 October	Yangoon	National Awareness Seminar in Myanmar
29-31 October	Yerevan	National Awareness Seminar in Armenia
2-4 November	Damascus	National Awareness Seminar in Syria
4-5 November	Almaty	National Awareness Seminar in Kazakhstan
6-8 November	Sana'a	
	National Awareness Seminar in Yemen	
9-12 December	Hyderabad	Afro-Asian NGO Conference on South/South and North/South Cooperation

1997

29 January	Amman	Tripartite Round Table for Rift Valley Joint Study
30 January	Damascus	Preparatory Meeting for Subregional Conference on West Asian Countries
17-20 March	Sede Boker	Meeting on the synergies between the Biodiversity, Climate Change and Desertification Conventions
18-20 March	Beirut	National Awareness Seminar in Lebanon
24-26 March	Tashkent	National Awareness Seminar in Uzbekistan
9-11 April	Damascus	Preparatory Meeting and Subregional Conference for Western Asia
21-23 April	Tbilisi	National Awareness Seminar in Georgia
22-23 April	Islamabad	National Awareness Seminar in Pakistan
28-30 April	Kiev	National Awareness Seminar in Ukraine
2-4 May	Bishkek	Newly Independent States NGO Conference
13-15 May	Beijing	Ministerial Conference for Asia
10-13 June	Tashkent	Interregional Conference for Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Transcaucasus
2-3 July	Ulan Bator	National Awareness Seminar in Mongolia
2-5 September	Niamey	Second Asia-Africa Forum on the implementation of the CCD

Latin America and the Caribbean**1995**

22 November	Buenos Aires	National Awareness Seminar in Argentina
29 Nov.-1 Dec.	La Paz	National Awareness Seminar in Bolivia
29 Nov.-1 Dec.	Ica	Latin American and Caribbean Regional NGO Conference
19-20 December	Santiago	National Awareness Seminar in Chile

1996

18-19 January	Lima	National Awareness Seminar in Peru
24-26 January	Buenos Aires	First Regional Meeting of the Latin American and Caribbean Region
12 March	La Paz	National Awareness Seminar in Bolivia
18-20 April	Santo Domingo	Subregional Meeting of Caribbean countries
23-24 April	Havana	National Awareness Seminar in Cuba
17-19 June	Mexico City	Second Regional meeting of the Latin American and Caribbean Region
16-18 September	Port-au-Prince	National Awareness Seminar in Haiti
23-24 September	Santo Domingo	National Awareness Seminar in the Dominican Republic
1-2 November	Rio de Janeiro	National Awareness Seminar in Brazil
10-12 November	San Francisco	NGO North-South Americas Forum

1997

25-26 February	Quito	National Awareness Seminar in Ecuador
10-12 March	Havana	Third Regional meeting of the Latin American and Caribbean Region
7-8 March	Havana	2nd Latin American and Caribbean Regional NGO Conference
11-13 July	Mexico City	National Awareness Seminar in Mexico

Northern Mediterranean**1994**

28-30 November	Brussels	NGO meeting on implementing the CCD
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1996

18-19 July	Madrid	Review Meeting on Progress in the Northern Mediterranean Region
21 October	Brussels	European NGO meeting
29 Oct.-1 Nov.	Crete	International Conference on Mediterranean Desertification: Research Results and Policy Implications
5-6 December	Brussels	NGO Round-Table discussions on the CCD
13-15 December	Barcelona	IV Euro-Med Forum (NGO)
19-21 December	Montpellier	Euro-Mediterranean NGO Forum

1997

10-12 April	Lisbon	Meeting of Northern Mediterranean Annex Countries
22-23 May	Murcia	Regional Conference for the Northern Mediterranean