

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

The issue of desertification became particularly acute due to the severe drought conditions in the Sudano-Sahelian regions which had reached catastrophic proportions in 1973. At its twenty-eighth session, in 1973, the General Assembly, by resolution 3054(XXVIII) of 17 October and resolution 3153 (XXVIII) of 28 November, noted with concern the great and disquieting magnitude of the effects of the drought and called upon assistance from the international community. In March 1974, at its second session, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) accorded priority to the establishment of integrated research programmes on arid and semi-arid lands, with particular attention to the Sudano-Sahelian region (decision 8 (II)).

At its twenty-ninth session, in 1974, the General Assembly adopted resolution 3337 (XXIX) of 17 December, by which the Assembly recalled, *inter alia*, its resolution 3202 (S-VI) of 1 May 1974 and noted Economic and Social Council resolutions on the issue of desertification (resolution 1878 (LVII) and resolution 1898 (LVII)), decided as a matter of priority to initiate concerted international action to combat desertification, and to convene in 1977 a United Nations Conference on Desertification to give impetus to the international action to combat desertification.

The United Nations Conference on Desertification was convened in Nairobi from 29 August to 9 September 1977. A comprehensive Plan of Action to Combat Desertification (PACD) was adopted (Report of the Conference, A/CONF.74/36).

In 1977, at its sixty-third session, the Economic and Social Council, by its decision 285 (LXIII) of 17 October, transmitted the report of the Conference to the General Assembly.

At its thirty-second session, in 1977, the General Assembly adopted resolution 32/172 of 19 December, by which it approved the report of the Conference. The Assembly decided, *inter alia*, to entrust UNEP and the Environment Co-ordination Board with the task of following up and co-ordinating implementation of the Plan of Action. The Governing Council of UNEP was requested to report on follow-up action, through the Economic and Social Council, to the Assembly in 1978 and thereafter every two years. On the same day, by resolutions 32/169 and 32/170, the General Assembly recommended speedy implementation of the Conference's resolution.

Between its thirty-third and forty-second sessions, the General Assembly, by several resolutions, took note of the reports of the UNEP Governing Council, and stressed the urgency of implementing the Plan of Action (resolutions 33/89 of 15 December 1978, 34/184 of 18 December 1979, 35/73 of 5 December 1980, 37/218 of 20 December 1982, 39/168 of 17 December 1984, and 42/189 A of 11 December 1987) and dealt with financing the Plan of Action (resolutions 36/191 of 17 December 1981, 37/220 of 20 December 1982, 38/163 of 19 December 1983, 40/198 of 17 December 1985, and 42/189 C of 11 December 1987).

At its forty-third and forty-fourth sessions, in 1988 and 1989 respectively, the General Assembly adopted resolutions 43/196 of 20 December 1988, 44/172 of 19 December and 44/228 of 22 December 1989, by which it decided, *inter alia*, to convene the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in June 1992, and established the Preparatory Committee for the conference. The Assembly invited the UNCED to accord high priority to desertification control and to deploy all means necessary to halt and reverse the process of desertification with a view to preserving the ecological balance of the planet.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development was held at Rio de Janeiro from 3 to 14 June 1992. Desertification was addressed under chapter 12 of Agenda 21 at the 19th plenary meeting on 14 June 1992 (Report of the Conference, A/CONF.151/26 (Vol. II)). A

request was made for the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session to establish an “Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the elaboration of an international convention to combat desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa” (INCD), with a view to finalizing such a convention by June 1994 (Report of the Conference, A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1(Vol.I); Report of the Secretary-General, Combating Desertification and Drought A/47/393).

At its forty-seventh session, in 1992, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of its Second Committee (A/47/719), adopted resolution 47/188 on 22 December, by which the Assembly established, *inter alia*, the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, which was open to participation by all Member States of the UN or members of the specialised agencies, as per the request suggested at UNCED.

The INCD, at its first session, held in Nairobi from 24 May to 3 June 1993, established two working groups. Working Group I was responsible for the elaboration of the introductory elements and Working Group II was responsible for the elaboration of the chapters on the Institutions and Administrative provisions (Report of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, A/48/226). The Committee also discussed the format and possible elements of the Convention (A/AC.241/7)

At the second session of the INCD, held at Geneva from 13 to 24 September 1993, the Chairmen of both Working Groups submitted summary reports on the nature of the various provisions of the convention (A/AC.241/WG.I/L.1 and A/AC.241/WG.II/L.1). As requested by the INCD in its first session, the Secretariat compiled, in a background negotiating document, written submissions from governments, including detailed drafting proposals, on the contents of an international convention to combat desertification (A/AC.241/12). The INCD further decided on the preparation of regional instruments focused on Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean (Report of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, A/48/226/Add.1).

At its forty-eighth session, in 1993, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of its Second Committee (A/48/725), adopted resolution 48/191 on 21 December, by which it urged the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to complete its negotiations by June 1994.

At the third session of the INCD, held at New York from 17 to 28 January 1994, both the Working Groups of the INCD focussed on the draft negotiating text of the convention (A/AC.241/WG.I/L.2 and A/AC.241/WG.II/L.2). As requested by the INCD at its second session, the Secretariat submitted a single negotiating text of the convention (A/AC.241/15 and Corr.1) and discussed the possible format and elements of a regional implementation annex for Africa (A/AC.241/17) (Report of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, A/49/84).

At its fourth session, held in Geneva from 21 to 31 March 1994, the INCD continued its discussions on the various provisions of the draft negotiating text of the convention (A/AC.241/15/Rev.1, A/AC.241/15/Rev.2, A/AC.241/15/Rev.3). In addition, Working Group II also considered the draft regional implementation annex for Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the northern Mediterranean (A/AC.241/WG.II/L.3) (Report of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, A/49/84/Add.1).

The fifth and final session of the INCD was held in Paris from 6 to 17 June 1994. At its 11th meeting, on 17 June, the INCD considered and adopted the draft final text of the convention (A/AC.241/15/Rev.6) and the regional implementation annexes (A/AC.241/19/Rev.1, A/AC.241/24, A/AC.241/25 and A/AC.241/26). The text of the Convention was opened for signature in Paris on the 14 and 15 of October, 1994 (Report of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, A/49/84/Add.2).

At its forty-ninth session, in 1994, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of its Second Committee (A/49/729/Add.4), adopted resolution 49/234, by which the Assembly welcomed the adoption of the Convention on 17 June 1994 in Paris and also the signing of the Convention in Paris. The Convention entered into force on 26 December 1996, 90 days after the fiftieth ratification was received, as required by its article 36, paragraph 1.