

# **International Conference on Combating Desertification**

(22-24 January 2008, Beijing)

## **BACKGROUND NOTE**

### **Background**

Desertification is a gradual degradation of land in arid, semi-arid, and dry sub-humid areas. It reduces biological diversity, lowers land productivity, and aggravates water scarcity. It threatens the sustainable livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people, and causes economic losses amounting to over US\$40 billion every year.

According to United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), worldwide, some 70 percent of the 5.2 billion hectares of agricultural land in arid areas are already degraded and threatened by desertification. Approximately, 135 million people are at risk of being displaced as a consequence of desertification, with broad long-term social-economic implications.

Climate change is exacerbating the extent and impact of desertification through reduced water availability, increased frequency of droughts and increased evaporation and changes in precipitation. With the degraded land losing value, investments in agriculture and rural development in these areas continue to decline, further deepening rural poverty and impeding sustainable development.

Combating desertification is therefore both an environmental and development priority.

The International Conference, jointly organized by the State Forestry Administration of the People's Republic of China (SFA) and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA), with support from the secretariat of the UNCCD and other UN organizations, seeks to review the desertification challenge in the broad context of sustainable development. It provides a timely opportunity for examining linkages among desertification, hunger and poverty and sustainable agriculture and rural development. The Conference focuses, in particular, on identifying barriers and constraints, and on exchanging lessons learned and best practices, in combating desertification.

The Conference is also being convened as an inter-sessional event in contribution to the 16th session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), which will address the issue of desertification, along with agriculture, land, drought, rural development, and Africa, at its 16th session in May 2008.

### **Objectives**

The Conference will bring together senior government decision-makers, representatives of local authorities, officials from the UN system and other international and regional organizations, researchers and experts, as well as practitioners and civil society groups, to share lessons learned and best practices in combating desertification in the broad context of sustainable development. The Conference will provide opportunities for ministerial statements and panel discussions in thematic sessions, to guide and facilitate an in-depth review of barriers and constraints, as well as policy options and practical measures, in combating desertification.

To this end, the Conference will emphasize the contributions of decision-makers and practitioners who are in the frontline of national, regional and international efforts and initiatives to combat desertification.

### **Expected outcomes**

The International Conference also provides an important platform for capacity-building of government decision-makers, representatives of local authorities, and practitioners. It is expected that the Conference will lead to a better understanding of the underlying causes of desertification and linkages with social and

economic factors, as well as more effective policy elaboration and implementation and more effective and science-based decision-making in combating desertification.

The International Conference will conclude with an agreed Statement on combating desertification and promoting sustainable development. There will also be a Summary of the Conference, reflecting deliberations at the opening and closing plenary sessions, national presentations and discussions at each thematic session.

The Statement and the Summary will be forwarded to CSD-16 for broader dissemination.

### **Programme**

The International Conference will consist of opening and closing plenary sessions, and a number of thematic sessions. Thematic sessions will focus on identifying barriers and constraints, as well as lessons learned and best practice, through national presentations, case studies and panel discussions. A provisional programme of sessions is being issued separately and is available at the following website: [http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/calendar/desertification\\_beijing2008.htm](http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/calendar/desertification_beijing2008.htm).

The closing plenary session will bring together the results of thematic sessions and highlight policy options and practical measures to advance progress in combating desertification.

The plenary and thematic sessions will be conducted in Chinese and English.

### **Participants**

Participants will include senior government decision-makers, representatives of local authorities, officials from the UN system and other international and regional organizations, researchers and experts, as well as practitioners and civil society groups.

There are no registration fees for participation.

### **Organization**

The International Conference is being organized jointly by the State Forestry Administration of the People's Republic of China and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA), which provides secretariat services for the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development.

The International Conference is also being supported by the secretariat of the UNCCD and other organizations of the United Nations system.

### **Conference venue**

The Conference will be held at Beijing International Hotel. The information about the conference venue and accommodation can be found at [www.bih.com.cn](http://www.bih.com.cn).

### **Logistics**

Detailed information on logistics, including registration, visa requirements, travel and hotel accommodation, etc., is contained in a separate *Information for Participants* note available at: [http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/calendar/desertification\\_beijing2008.htm](http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/calendar/desertification_beijing2008.htm)

### **Contacts**

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