



SECRETARIAT OF THE CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION
SECRETARIAT DE LA CONVENTION SUR LA LUTTE CONTRE LA DESERTIFICATION



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Excellencies,

I would like to thank you for your letter dated 19th December 2007. At the outset, we would like to state that we have welcomed the debate on enhanced international environmental governance. We would like to commend you for having prepared a highly substantive and yet compact paper that captures key aspects of and diverse positions on the current issues.

The informal consultative process on the institutional framework for the UN environmental activities is an important exercise and its follow-up is to be handled carefully: We share the common objective of seeking to strengthen environmental governance but in my view this is better attempted by building on the framework that has been painstakingly evolved by the international community relatively recently and which must be given sufficient time to be implemented before we can credibly assess its effectiveness and determine whether radical change or restructuring is necessary.

In my view enhanced coordination must be our common goal so that we build on synergies and improve coordination particularly among the MEAs. This in turn would also enable us to take fully into account the views and needs of member states in order to improve the environmental governance system in a manner that is both effective and responsive to their needs.

While we look forwards progressing under the guidance of the General Assembly, we are all aware that a Conference of Parties (COP) is an intergovernmental leadership process. It is my opinion that, taking into account the views of member states as reflected in the various COP decisions, any radical restructuring of sovereign decision making and reporting mechanisms, would be counterproductive and undermine the very objective of the exercise to improve environmental governance. It may not be helpful if the collection of views on the Option Paper would be translated into proposals that could be seen as lacking consistency with present systems of legislative authority.

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Rather, the usefulness of the Option Paper is to pave the way for a desirable change in bringing greater rationality and efficiency in environmental governance. Progress in this respect must be achieved, taking into account the transaction costs of coordination.

In the context of the milestone strategic decision of the UNCCD COP, and as indicated also under chapter 4 of the options paper, countries have not proposed to fundamentally alter the mandate and functions of the UNCCD institutions. We advocate with the co-chairs the need for coordination around dynamic clusters and agree that decisions in the various forums should be better linked but possible ways forward can be formulated in terms that are compatible with existing realities.

We thus emphasize the need to respect the Convention's normative, legislative and policy governance process and for a realistic scheduling of administrative or institutional measures. For instance suggestions of joint COPs or joint reporting underrate the respective complexities of the Convention's processes. Moreover this ignores the desire of member states for a greater specialized focus on different aspects of the environment.

As far as the UNCCD is concerned, it is clear that there is a need for enhanced synergies among various actors in this field, at national and local levels. Indeed capacity building for synergy at country level would deliver the most cost effective services to affected country parties. In other words, it is at the implementation level of the mandates of the conventions that the most significant win-win-win opportunities occur.

As a point of reference, we would like to dwell on the new UNCCD strategy adopted at COP 8 in Madrid in September 2007, as it also has a bearing on structural implications and governance mechanisms that are to be put in place. The adoption of the 10 year strategy by the 192 Parties to the Convention at the recent COP reflects their desire to strengthen the UNCCD as a unique instrument to combat desertification and land degradation and enhance its effectiveness. I am enclosing a copy of the global UNCCD Strategy for easy reference.

In substance the coverage of the UNCCD 10 years strategy goes to the heart of the discussions on system-wide coherence recommendations now under way. The UNCCD has a tremendous opportunity to reduce environmental, social and economic vulnerability and expand the outreach of the adaptation measures to climate change in greater partnership with sister Conventions. It can thus bridge the gap between the conservation and the development agendas.

I am certain the Convention can be an agent of change to address, in an integrated manner, issues of sustainable livelihoods in the context of the necessary maintenance of eco system services. However this potential should be better recognized than is presently the case in the Block 3 of the paper of the Co-chairs.

Let me offer a few comments on that building block that most addresses the MEAs, although my comments are merely illustrative of the need to achieve now more realism/accuracy. For instance the clustering proposal in concern does not seem to take into account the very nature and purpose of the UNCCD. In fact, the text of the Convention would make it clear that UNCCD is not only a "conservation" convention, but also seeks to advance sustainable development in a broader sense, as clearly recognized by UNCED and successive GA Resolutions.



In this regard, since the exercise of environmental review is system wide, you may wish to consider promoting a more dynamic and substance oriented clustering on land issues. In this respect, you may recall that a couple of years ago, in a study carried out by your office for the President of the General Assembly on possible clustering of MEAs, the UNCCD was identified as the only International Treaty addressing the issue of land. ||

The new Strategy can make an important normative contribution on the front of preserving land based ecosystem services including soil and land productivity, maintaining arable land to safeguard food security. The EMG for instance is in the process of recognizing that the UNCCD Strategy can facilitate a more system wide cooperation through a "sustainable land management" cluster with, notably, FAO, IFAD, UNDP and UNEP. This effort at rationalization we have launched has clear merits for the success of the IEG. ||

On the inclusion of UNEP in the Joint Liaison Group of the Rio Conventions, let me observe that this specific group is an administrative arrangement between the three Executive Secretaries of the Rio conventions. The group should decide the question of the membership of the group. Including UNEP would change its nature and while there may be merits to the proposal, they should be made more explicit.

At its 7th meeting on 7th June 2007, the JLG agreed on a number of activities at the level of secretariats to enhance cooperation among the Rio conventions. This was done with a view to operationalizing these activities in the near future. These include:

- Sharing reports and reviews of national planning processes, where available, and highlighting lessons learned that might be relevant across conventions;
- Continue to facilitate joint meetings between the chairs of the scientific bodies of the conventions;
- Sharing reviews and lessons learned regarding the functioning of the convention bodies;
- Keeping staff in other secretariats informed of discussions and decisions on relevant synergistic activities or programmes

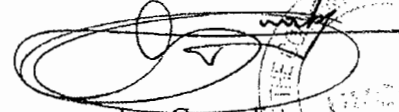
The JLG further agreed to develop joint activities in the field of communication and education. The 7th JLG meeting also agreed to draft joint information notes that were distributed during the UNFCCC COP 13 in December in Bali.

In conclusion I wish full success in your endeavor to prioritize the wealth of elements submitted to your attention to open a realistic path for enhanced governance and reaching the required balance between taking into account the prevailing normative, institutional and policy regime and installing the conditions for required change.

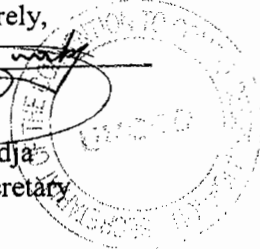


I clearly welcome an opportunity to share with you considered views that would also represent the thinking of our Parties on those issues and to meet at an opportune occasion. I thank you in advance for taking the time to consider how better justice can be made in using the UNCCD as an integrative tool for change and a normative framework that bridges gaps between development and environment.

Yours sincerely,



Luc Gnacadja
Executive Secretary

A circular stamp of the UNCCD Secretariat. The outer ring contains the text "UNCCD SECRETARIAT" at the top and "UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION" at the bottom. The center of the stamp features the UNCCD logo.

Encl: The Strategy