

Declaration by Members of Parliament

*Eighth Round Table of Members of Parliament
Buenos Aires, 24 and 25 September 2009
in parallel with the ninth session of the Conference of the Parties to the
United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification*

The role of Members of Parliament in the efforts to combat desertification: parliamentary contributions to achieving food security and addressing climate change in the drylands under the current economic crisis

We, members of parliament, meeting in Buenos Aires on 24 and 25 September 2009 for the eighth Round Table at the invitation of the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), with the best and full support of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Parliament of Argentina, alongside the ninth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 9);

Reaffirm our commitment to do our utmost in strengthening the political will, which is essential for the successful implementation of the UNCCD and for the achievement of sustainable human development at local, national, regional and global levels;

Are alarmed by the continuous trends and perils of land degradation, soil erosion, drought and impoverishment, particularly in the fragile ecosystems and drylands of developing countries (24 per cent of the global terrestrial area had been degraded in 25 years), while admitting success stories in combating desertification at the grassroots level in many countries (almost 16 per cent of that area had been improved);

Acknowledge that besides the tasks of maintaining peace and avoiding wars between and within countries, our globe is faced by two challenges in this century: the fight against poverty and hunger, and climate change through sustainable development paths – challenges which are sharpened by the current economic crisis and cannot be tackled without addressing food security and desertification issues;

Emphasize that the convergence of the global food, fuel and economic crises, against a backdrop of climatic changes, presents an unprecedented opportunity for action to reshape the development agenda and to renew parliamentary efforts;

Recognize that a positive resolve to stimulate UNCCD implementation was expressed at the eighth session of the Conference of the Parties in Madrid in September 2007 as Parties to the Convention adopted the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (The Strategy). The Strategy targets the use of effective and practical approaches to sustainable land management with synergy as a systemic approach. The main strategic objectives are: (i) to improve the livelihood of affected populations; (ii) to improve the productivity of affected populations; (iii) to generate global benefits; and (iv) to mobilize resources to support the implementation of the Convention through building effective partnerships between national and international actors. The Strategy should also be supported by Parliaments and the IPU.

We, the Parliamentarians, declare and demand:

A. Food security in the drylands

1. There is no human security without food security. This reality applies above all to the people living in degraded or desertification-prone drylands and belonging to the world's poorest, most marginalized, and politically weak citizens. The drylands stretching across Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia, as well as parts of Latin America, are the most crisis-ridden parts of the planet.
2. Parliamentary activities related to food security in the drylands start from three baselines: (a) affected States have the primary role in combating food insecurity; (b) the participation of affected populations and local communities, particularly women and youth, must be ensured; and (c) developed States must actively support, individually or jointly, suitable efforts of affected developing countries.
3. The enactment of enabling legislation is a key tool for combating desertification, the protection of human rights including the right to food, and environmental governance at the national level.
4. Parliaments have a responsibility to work for a food security enabling environment. Policies that improve the security of land use rights are a prerequisite for sustainable land management (SLM). To maintain the productivity of arable land and top soil fertility, access to water should be secured.
5. The regulations and investment legislations for international land deals – underpinned i. a. by food security concerns, a rising demand for biofuels and other non-food agricultural commodities – must be influenced and monitored by the respective parliaments in order to ensure that land deals maximise the public interest, the investment's contribution to sustainable development and the benefits for the rural poor.
6. Parliaments should look for the establishment or strengthening of food security systems, including storage and marketing facilities, particularly in rural areas of the drylands.
7. The UNCCD is forward-looking in that it promotes the enhancement of local ownership and the empowerment of farmers in SLM. Governments or regional and local communities backed or driven by parliamentarians should put issues relevant to SLM on their agendas and approve corresponding ordinances, laws and rules of use. Parliaments and parliamentarians should mainstream SLM into long-term policies and national development strategies.
8. Because of its relevance to food security, poverty reduction and political stability, as well as to sustainable development and the environment, agriculture needs a re-evaluation in the political arena; parliamentarians in developed and developing countries have to play their roles. At least 10 % of the national budgets should be allocated to agriculture. More countries could benefit if governments and donors were to reverse years of policy neglect and remedy their disinvestment in agriculture and in rural areas. Development assistance must be effective, strengthening rather than undermining country efforts to improve governance in agriculture. Agricultural protection in donor countries and subsidized agricultural exports often undermine the assistance available to agriculture and efforts in developing countries, creating a governance challenge for donor countries as well as policy coherence.

9. Parliaments should strive to ensure that food, agricultural trade and overall trade policies are conducive to fostering food security for all through a fair market-oriented non-speculative world trade system embedded in a sustainable, socially balanced and fair globalization. Global problems such as the recent economic turbulences require coordinated, global solutions. Financial institutions must be accountable, transparent, and subject to strong oversight. The most vulnerable people and countries must not be forgotten. Parliaments have a particular responsibility to ensure transparency and accountability in the economic and financial reform process; they have a duty to question ministers and hold them to the strictest possible account for implementing what has been agreed at international meetings.

B. Climate change in the drylands

10. The IPU rightly called on parliaments and parliamentarians to understand that they bear a special responsibility for the protection of natural resources and for the sustainable development of our planet.

11. The impacts of climate change combined with the global economic crisis, rising food prices, energy shortages, ecosystem degradation linked to other human causes and demographic change must be managed in a coordinated manner. The poor and hungry in the drylands are suffering the most from the double blow of desertification and climate change.

12. The UNCCD cannot be viewed in isolation from other efforts to promote sustainable development. The integration of environmental activities into the broader development framework is at the heart of MDG 7. The text of the Convention refers frequently to sustainable development, climate change, biological diversity, water resources, energy sources, food security and socio-economic factors. The Convention must work as a multilateral soil framework for adaptation, mitigation and resilience in combating the effects of climate change.

13. Furthermore, the Convention should be better linked with efforts to accomplish relevant objectives under climate change processes, and efforts to promote human security, tackle forced migration and prevent conflict.

14. Desertification and climate change must be addressed in a synergetic fashion, as part of an integrated approach to achieving sustainable development for all. Combating desertification needs to be recognized as an entry point to address poverty reduction and ecosystem protection. The interlinkages between land/soil and climate change are significant and should be better reflected in policymaking processes, including parliamentary activities.

15. Institutions have a crucial role to play everywhere. Climate change actions, development planning and disaster risk reduction must come together. This requires that they are led from the highest political and organizational level. Participatory democracy, functioning institutions and transparency are needed at all levels for effective adaptation and mitigation.

16. Land and soil can make a difference in the fight against climate change. Increased attention to the linkage between land and soil and climate change would not only enrich the substantive and conceptual debates on effective means for carbon sequestration, but also provide a new and interesting platform for developing countries to enter into the adaptation and mitigation agendas, considering that for many of them soil is their single most important natural resource.

17. SLM has significant potential to mitigate climate change – not only by afforestation and

reducing deforestation. Soil carbon sequestration, through restoring organic soils and improving degraded lands, conservation agriculture and grassland as well as water management can contribute significantly to reducing emissions. One concrete way forward could be to expand the coverage of the Clean Development Mechanism to agricultural land use, to include projects focusing on carbon sequestration in soil. SLM offers a cost-efficient contribution to climate protection and is essential to achieving the MDGs and global food security.

18. Governments are requested to promote the establishment of an international financial institution – funded by industries that contribute to negative climate change – for financing adaptation measures and the mitigation of severe environmental degradation

19. Because of the importance of financing the needed mitigation measures and the absence of quantified compulsory means against for polluting states to contribute to this financing, the UN are invited to adopt enforceable legal measures against polluters.

20. The UN is invited to consider seriously setting up an international instrument, in accordance with international law, such as an international judiciary body specially for handling environmental pollution cases and their consequences.

21. The development and deployment of renewable energies (wind power, biomass and biogas, photovoltaic and solar energy, hydroelectricity and geothermal energy) hold great promise in reconciling the increasing needs for energy, particularly in the developing world, and the ability of the environment to meet present and future needs. Renewables are one of the best means of promoting low-carbon economies, helping to cut and reduce CO₂ emissions, contributing to energy self-sufficiency and security of supply, reducing dependence on fossil fuels (oil, gas and coal) and mineral resources (uranium), and helping to boost regional economies and safeguard jobs through reliance on local energy sources.

22. It is recommended to promote ways avoiding royalties and other levies for the transfer of clean technologies.

23. Desertification and land degradation issues deserve global policy attention and the needs of drylands must be fully integrated into the Copenhagen Protocol.

24. The initiative for a Global Green New Deal in Copenhagen should be supported on the condition that SLM becomes an integral part of it and of future climate protection strategies. A Special International Environment Fund should be created for this purpose.

C. Parliaments – a stronger commitment and political will

25. ***We, the Parliamentarians, are convinced:*** The relationships between desertification, SLM and food security, and between soil and climate change are important; they have transboundary impacts and should be better reflected in policymaking processes. We commit ourselves to work for it that Parliaments and parliamentarians will become ambassadors for this relationship and agents of change.

26. The UNCCD deserves more success for the sake of the people living under desertification stress and greater visibility – by sharpening UNCCD's profile and institutions, making desertification a cornerstone in the general architecture of global environmental governance, making a priority on the agenda of decision-makers, giving more weight to desertification, land degradation and water policies in government and parliaments, involving

more actively the stakeholders at all levels, improving land management and regional cooperation, enhancing institutional and people's capacities, raising much greater awareness, and pursuing an advocacy and mediating role in other international processes of relevance to UNCCD concerns, and – last but not least – by providing to affected country parties which adopted NAPs the necessary financial means.

27. Some concrete proposals may contribute to bringing forward the cause of desertification, land degradation and soil erosion, such as: the recognition of the topsoil as a common good, the establishment of an International Panel on Desertification, a UNCCD peer review mechanism within the new terms of reference of the CRIC, regular 'green accounting' government reports, the holding of Youth Summits, a Soil Protection Prize.

28. We will do our utmost in strengthening the political will at the national and international level, which is essential for the successful implementation of the UNCCD.

29. The parliaments of the developed countries must work for the increase of official development assistance, particularly in those countries which did not reach the 0.7 per cent target so far; until 2015 this target should be reached.

30. The Parliamentary Network of the UNCCD (PNoUNCCD) needs a regular funding. It must be better used by parliament and parliamentarians. Its Steering Committee should give better inputs and monitor the work of parliamentarians under the UNCCD.

31. Parliaments and parliamentarians should work to ensure good developmental governance.

32. A UN Parliamentary Assembly could strengthen the effectiveness, transparency, representativeness, plurality and legitimacy of the work of the institutions that compose the UN system. The establishment of a UNPA could also be a parliamentary oversight centrepiece of the renewed system of international financial and economic governance.

33. ***Finally, as members of parliaments*** we request the UNCCD secretariat, with the assistance of the Inter-Parliamentary Union:

34. To take appropriate follow-up action on the outcomes of the present Round Table;

35. To facilitate the organization of the ninth Parliamentarians Forum in conjunction with the tenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention.

36. ***We, as members of parliaments,*** appeal to the President of the Steering Committee to transmit this Declaration to :

- a) the organizers of the World Summit on Food Security (Rome 16-18 November 2009);
- b) the negotiators of the Copenhagen process (Copenhagen 7-18 December 2009) so that it could be taken into consideration when deciding on the post-Kyoto agreement in particular in account of the paragraphs 23 and 24 of the Declaration.