

1.74 Combating Desertification

RECOGNIZING that about 900 million people are estimated to be at the risk of being affected by the process of desertification, which is destroying the fertility of arable and non-renewable land resources;

COGNIZANT of the disastrous impact of the tropic Sahelian droughts and severe desertification of 1968–1973, and the continuing vulnerability of fragile drylands to human activities, including over-grazing, population pressures, droughts and a general failure to follow sustainability principles in the development of such regions;

WELCOMING the adoption of the Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa (1994), which requires signatories to:

- a) combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought in the affected countries through effective action at all levels;
- b) support activities relevant to combating desertification through international cooperation, consistent with the integrated approach recommended in Agenda 21;
- c) formulate National, Sub-Regional and Regional Action Programmes to combat land degradation and desertification to be implemented in affected countries with the collaboration and participation of donors, NGOs, community-based organizations and government agencies;

RECOGNIZING that the effectiveness of the Convention will largely depend on the number of signatories;

RECOGNIZING also the importance of recent regional and sub-regional conferences on this topic held in the last two years;

The World Conservation Congress at its 1st Session in Montreal, Canada, 14–23 October 1996:

1. CALLS ON all States which have not already done so to ratify the Convention as soon as possible;
2. CALLS UPON governments to develop national legal and other measures to assist in combating desertification, giving particular attention to the role of NGOs, local communities and women as natural resources managers, in the implementation of the Convention;
3. REQUESTS the GEF Secretariat and implementing agencies to assist affected countries (and NGOs) to present eligible projects on desertification for GEF financing;
4. CALLS ON bilateral and multilateral agencies to consider maintaining and/or reinforcing the financial support they give to combating desertification;
5. CALLS ON the States affected by desertification to apply the human and financial resources required to combat desertification, in accordance with the commitments under the Convention;
6. REQUESTS the Director General, within available resources, to:
 - a) give priority in the IUCN Programme (including the work of the Commission on Ecosystem Management) to supporting the implementation of the Convention, and establish a focal point within the Secretariat for that purpose;
 - b) collaborate with governments, community based organizations and NGOs in the preparation and implementation of national sub-regional and regional action programmes to combat land degradation and desertification;

- c) support the members in the implementation of the provisions of the Convention, particularly by drawing on the expertise on desertification issues within its networks of Commission experts;
- d) assist governments and NGOs of countries affected by desertification to better understand existing (and future) financial mechanisms to gain access to support for programmes to combat desertification;
- e) coordinate IUCN activities with the Secretariat to the Convention on Desertification.