



TABLE OF CONTENTS

LEADING ARTICLE

1.- Brief review of the visit to Argentina of the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, Luc Gnacadja

NEWS IN BRIEF

2.- In memory of Clara Ferrer

INSTITUTIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

3.- Interview with the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

OUR PEOPLE

4.- Soledad Pereyra, member of the *Fundación Hábitat y Desarrollo*

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UNDP Project ARG/06/008
"Building Strategic Financial Partnerships to Consolidate the National Action Programme to Combat Desertification in Argentina"



Leading Article

Brief Review of the visit to Argentina of the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, Luc Gnacadja



The Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Luc Gnacadja, an architect, visited Argentina on 7-10 October 2008, together with UNCCD Programme Officer, Dr. Richard Cox. There follows a brief review of their Agenda.

Tuesday, 7 October

Mr. Gnacadja, Mr. Cox, and Mr. Octavio Perez Pardo, an engineer and Director for Soil Conservation and the Fight against Desertification, Secretariat for the Environment and Sustainable Development, held a meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship with Ambassador Raúl Ricardes, General Coordinator of Multilateral Affairs; Ambassador María Susana Pataro, recently appointed Argentine Ambassador to Nigeria; Counselor Ariel Fernández, Director of the Sub-Saharan Africa Department; Counselor Alexandra Viggiano, from the General Directorate of International Cooperation; Counselor Jorge Insausti, who will soon be transferred to the Argentine Representation in Nigeria; and Secretary Mariano Alvarez Wagner from the General Directorate of Environmental Affairs.

During the meeting, the Executive Secretary briefly outlined the characteristics of the New Ten-Year Strategy of the Convention (2008-2018), emphasizing the need to promptly implement it given the developments in desertification, land degradation and drought.

Within this framework reference was made to the restructuring of the Secretariat and the Global Mechanism; and to the advisability of having the Science and Technology Committee agree on a baseline and on globally renowned and accepted indicators to monitor soil degradation. In this regard, he underlined the need for the process not to be politicized and that it is based merely on scientific grounds. He also referred to how important it is for the Committee to Review the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) to set forth new standardized guidelines for the drafting of national reports, including benchmark indicators.

AGENDA

27 October - 7 November:

Delivery of computers, projectors, screens and dissemination material to the six Patagonian provinces within the framework of the GEF-UNDP Patagonia Project ARG/07/G35.

30-31 October: San Luis
First Country-Wide Meeting on Environmental Education for Sustainable Development.

30-31 October: Centro de Convenciones de Limache, Salta
First National Meeting on Climate Change.

3-5 November: Costa Rica
International Seminar "Adaptation to Climate Change: the role of ecosystemic services".

3-14 November: Istanbul, Turkey
Seventh Session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (CRIC 7).

5-6 November: Buenos Aires
International Conference on Environmental Law "Environmental Zoning of City Territories".

11-14 November: Mendoza
31st Working Meeting of the Argentine Association of Renewable Energy and the Environment (ASADES, 2008).

Ambassador Ricardes stated Argentina's commitment to protecting the environment, and mentioned the relationship of the latter with economic development (especially the environment, energy production and water resource management) and the country's willingness to collaborate in the quest for global solutions to the problem brought about by the scourge of desertification.

Along the same line as the Secretary's statements regarding a better streamlining of the Convention, the Foreign Office officials underscored the importance of not having too many fora and of not wasting resources but instead of coordinating efforts, ensuring a greater articulation among existing mechanisms so as to better tap them.

Furthermore, Mr. Gnacadja highlighted Argentina's broad experience in the field and the successful implementation of the tools included in the Convention. He highlighted that Argentina is the Latin American country that has the greatest experience in the matter and the highest number of activities in the area. Ambassador Pataro pointed out that, within a South-South cooperation scheme, Argentina is willing to collaborate through technical cooperation, capacity building, etc. with Africa, the region most affected by desertification (within a framework of reinforced relationships with African countries, particularly Sub-Saharan ones).



Among the potential assistance devices, Ambassador Ricardes mentioned the Argentine FO-AR international cooperation scheme and provided the example of a successful application in Haiti of the ProHuerta mechanism (a rural family production system designed in Argentina and used in different regions of the country). The side effect of the system is to mitigate migrations caused by desertification.

With regard to the feasibility of cooperation to combat desertification between Argentina and Africa, both parties agreed on how beneficial it would be to resort to triangular schemes.

These appear as alternative options to the scarcity of available national resources thus allowing the tapping of Argentina's deep knowledge and the noteworthy quality of the country's scientists and technicians (mainly from the National Institute of Agricultural Technology –INTA- and the Argentine Institute of Research in Arid Zones -IAIZA).

Among the topics highlighted at the meeting was the importance attached to the activities carried out in Latin America and the Caribbean to implement the Convention. Since the very beginning, Argentina has supported this important regional process. It must also be recalled that the country was the first venue for a Regional Meeting and has participated in all the initiatives in this regard, such as the Coordination of the TPN1 Reference Points and Thematic Indicator Programme, among others.

In the evening, the Executive Secretary traveled to Santiago del Estero province.

Wednesday, 8 October

In the morning, Secretary Gnacadja, and Messrs. Cox and Perez Pardo met in the city of Santiago del Estero with members of the Environmental Group for Development (GADE by its Spanish acronym) and the Fundación del Sur who have been implementing the CDM project on Forestation to Combat Desertification, Mitigate Climate Change and Protect Biodiversity "Youth Environmental Groups". The meeting was also attended by representatives of the Ministry of Production, *Universidad Nacional de Santiago del Estero* and the National Institute of Agricultural Technology (INTA).

The executing agencies introduced the above-mentioned Project and referred to the activities carried out to date and the impacts of its implementation. An INTA representative then described how carbon sequestration had been monitored and how the project baseline had been established.

The Secretary was impressed by the work carried out and suggested that it be continued so that the Project could become an example to the world. He moreover emphasized the need to implement it on a larger scale at the provincial level.



Experiences were then exchanged when the delegation visited the Colonia El Simbolar plant nursery, in the Robles Department. The Secretary asked the younger participants questions about production, training and the important role with regard to gender equality and the practice acquired during these last few years

The group then visited plots of land used for forestation within the framework of this Project and, within this context technical experts explained how important forestation is for soil recovery in land degraded by salinity and abandonment of its agricultural use.

After returning to the capital city of Santiago, officials met with Provincial Governor, Dr. Gerardo Zamora, who expressed the importance of the CDM Project that aims at recovering degraded land which will help farmers obtain their livelihood. He also mentioned the Project's potential implementation in other countries and highlighted the possibility of it being considered a pilot site in the country. Furthermore he stated his hope that this small contribution of his province be considered a unique example of forestation in Latin America.

A luncheon was offered at the San Marcos provincial plant nursery, where regional dishes were served, folk music was played and regional dances were performed. The highest government authorities and leaders of the provincial farmer associations participated in the lunch. Discussions then took place, presided over by the provincial Production Minister, Mr. Luis Gelid and by Mr. Pérez Pardo.

In the evening the group traveled back to Buenos Aires.

Thursday, 9 October

Messrs. Gnacadja and Perez Pardo held a meeting with the head of the Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Food, Mr. Carlos Cheppi, an engineer, and with the President of the National Institute of Agricultural Technology, Mr. Carlos Paz, also an engineer.

Mr. Cheppi underscored that Argentina currently produces 100 million tons of grain, within a system of weak environmental sustainability, and that the country's goal is to reach 150 million tons, while also improving sustainable land management. He stated it was thus necessary to implement crop rotation schemes and alternate production in the different areas through a regulatory framework that promotes such actions.



The Executive Secretary said he was very interested in working with the Environment Secretariat as well as with the Agriculture Secretariat and INTA, since they have experts who are renowned beyond the country's boundaries, in order to define an evaluation and monitoring system to ensure sustainable land management based on sound scientific groundings. Furthermore, he highlighted that an appropriate use of the soil mitigates climate change since it helps to sequester carbon dioxide in the soil.

He also added that if Argentina moves forward along this line, it would be possible to analyze a regional proposal linking the fight against desertification with climate change mitigation. National officials agreed that the Argentine Government and the Convention should define a roadmap for this idea.

In the afternoon, at the Secretariat of the Environment and Sustainable Development, Mr. Perez Pardo, made a presentation called Implementation of the UNCCD in Argentina – National Action Programme to Combat Desertification, in which he described in detail the national political priorities and the strategic and operational objectives approved by the Parties to the Convention for the 2008-2018 ten-year period.

The meeting was attended by institutional representatives who are members of the NAP National Advisory Committee (CAN, by its Spanish acronym) and Sub-National Focal Points of RIOD –who the day before had participated in the Eleventh Meeting of this Committee-. Those responsible in Argentina for the LADA pilot sites and several educational officials as well as others from national, provincial and municipal governments also participated in the meeting.

Participants then exchanged experiences and talked about the different activities carried out within the NAP framework. CAN representatives delivered a petition in which they highlighted several priorities to be taken into account by the Secretariat.

A cocktail was served after the meeting.

Friday, 10 October

In the morning, a Round Table on Climate Change and Desertification was held at the Secretariat of the Environment and Sustainable Development to discuss the way of strengthening bonds to mitigate both problems.

Mr Perez Pardo made a presentation on the National Strategy to Combat Desertification and Dr. Nazareno Castillo Marín, Director of Climate Change referred to the National Strategy on Climate Change.



Dr. Vicente Barros, *Universidad de Buenos Aires*, talked about the future scenarios related to drought and temperatures. Daniel Tomasini, an engineer and United Nations Development Programme official, provided the agency's view with regard to both problems while Carlos Merenson, an engineer and National Director of Environmental Zoning and Biodiversity Conservation, recognized there is a remarkable difference between the scientific-technical approach and the political one when it comes to proposing solutions to global climate change issues. Whilst the former wonder to what extent emissions should be decreased to avoid the most harmful effects of global climate change, the latter wonder what degree of decrease in emissions would be politically feasible. There is indeed an abyss between one reply and the other. The same happens with each and every one of the environmental threats we must face, including the fight against desertification and drought.

He then focused on identifying technologies and economic reforms needed to restructure the world's energy economics and to outline new practices in the use of soil so as to stabilize the climate and put a brake on desertification. Based on the above, he stated the challenge does not entail awaiting the development of new technologies but instead building the political will to introduce the necessary changes.

Finally, he pointed out that we are nowadays faced with the dilemma between the scientifically necessary and the politically feasible, given existing nature and our political systems. Our destiny will depend on our choice.

Mr. José María Musmeci, Undersecretary of Planning and Environmental Policy talked about the support of the Secretariat of the Environment and Sustainable Development to work on both issues.

Mr. Gnacadja then held press interviews.

Brief News

In memory of Clara Ferrer

Clara Ferrer passed way on 5 October. She was an engineer and a part of the Chair of Technology and Soil Conservation, School of Agricultural Sciences, *Universidad Nacional de Jujuy*. For many years Clara worked in Jujuy - the province where she was born- on combating desertification, among other topics, involving local communities and supporting and collaborating in different projects within the framework of the Argentine NAP.

Interview with the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

Before ending his visit to Argentina, the Executive Secretary allocated time on his Agenda to talk to this Digital Newsletter about many current topics. There follow the most important ideas of this interview.

-Do you believe that the current world crisis can have an impact on the implementation of the UNCCD?

-Yes, I am very worried indeed because it shifts the focus of attention of the global community or, at least, its priorities. For instance, at the G-8 Summit comments were drafted on what should be done about climate change or, better say, what should be done to improve development in the most vulnerable countries. They undertook a commitment based on an evaluation but so far such commitment has not been honoured.

The current world crisis has somehow hindered or will in the future hinder the implementation of such commitments. Another issue is that we know we must fully consider land and soil-related services within the context of global production of food and renewable energy, although there is the risk that the global players remain reluctant to focus on the topic. We will all act as firefighters putting out fires that broke out within the current financial crisis. To counter this, what we can offer is that when decision makers have an idea of what should be done, they act. Billions of dollars were suddenly injected into the banking and financial systems to bail out these institutions. But we are talking about our global ecosystem going bankrupt too because we misused or exhausted our bank account, considering the ecosystem as if it were a bank account. And very little has been done in this regard.

-How is the new UNCCD Ten-year Strategy being implemented?

-At present the Strategy calls for a few reforms. The first is to restructure the Global Mechanism Secretariat so that it can facilitate an efficient implementation of the Strategy. We must invest time and efforts and once the restructuring of the Secretariat has taken place we will have all we need to develop and implement the Strategy. For instance, we have reflected the medium run strategies of the Ten-Year Strategy in a two-year programme which will be discussed at CRIC 7 in Istanbul.

The second reform we are implementing is in the Science and Technology Committee so that it operates within a more scientific format, so that procedures are truly scientific and, furthermore, to ensure that the priority is to agree upon a common platform recognized globally to identify indicators to upgrade, for instance, the work on topics related to drought and land degradation. We are facilitating standardized guidelines for reports which includes information on what to measure and how, that is, the methodology, so that the countries draft their reports in a similar manner and these be used as a benchmark of what is happening globally. We will thus have a global mechanism to monitor degradation and land improvement. We are currently working on this and I really hope the Parties take into account the role they have to play in implementing this Ten-Year Strategy.

-Which is the role of the developed and developing countries within the Strategy's framework?

-There are areas in which there is a common role and others in which it is disperse, areas with common responsibilities and others in which responsibilities are different. The medium-term strategy and the work entrusted to the Parties requires that they use the future monitoring system so as to make decisions and commit themselves to quantitative and qualitative objectives at the country level. Global management must be brought down to country level. In that regard the most vulnerable countries can benefit from the mechanisms to be designed to channel resources and thus achieve qualitative and quantitative objectives. Developed countries will have the responsibility of providing resources that will be brought down to the local level.

Once we know what to measure, we will be capable of developing a mechanism to fulfill this sector's commitment.

Why? Who erodes the soil if we consider the human factor? Small farmers, big companies, big landowners that use the land and the soil? If we want to change the human factor we must design incentives integrated into local policies to use a reward system for defending ecosystems and the land.



Soledad Pereyra

She holds a degree in Biology and works at the Santa Fe offices of the *Fundación Hábitat y Desarrollo*, an NGO that promotes environmental conservation and preservation.

Soledad works 80 km from the Santa Fe capital city, in Helvecia, a town of 2000 inhabitants, located on the Parana River.

She acts as a facilitator and trainer using the *Chaco Americano* Didactic Binder and also teaches Ecology II in a tertiary level career on Tourism and at a secondary school.

Within the framework of the Argentina NAP, *Fundación Hábitat* carried out activities as, for instance, a classroom and distance learning course for teachers within the formal education system and a workshop for citizens who are concerned about environmental issues and for representatives from nearby towns.

-What is your opinion about the role to be played by international organizations such as GEF and the World Bank?

-Within the global food crisis currently affecting the world, the IMF can be called upon to increase investments in rural sectors and in agriculture. This is a different strategy from the one applied at the end of the 70s and beginning of the 80s when the structural adjustments put an end to investments in the rural sector in many developing countries. We can now underscore that there has been a change in paradigm which leads the World Bank and IMF to commit themselves to land and soil management. At the United Nations we must tell the Global Mechanism how to do it and ask GEF to finance the global benefits stemming from the implementation of related activities.

Other agencies must join in and provide funding to recover degraded land because we know that these organizations will have to address many global challenges.

We must still solve problems such as land degradation and migrations and encourage the population to produce bio-fuels that are good for the land.

-Desertification and poverty are closely linked to one another. What measures should be taken to include both topics (environmental and social) into development policies at the global level?

-To cover both topics it is necessary to put land management at the core of the UNCCD's implementation. When we talk about sustainable land management, certain policies should be sustainable and adapted so as to mitigate land degradation. Whenever we wish to convey sound messages on land management, we must always start by addressing the affected population's capacity building. It is also necessary to provide this population with the pertinent tools so that they learn how to improve their capacity. We are thus giving them the possibility to upgrade their own ecosystems. This does away with the vicious circle and turns it into a virtuous circle.

-How do you view the role of civil society within the UNCCD?

-I believe the Strategy provides us with new roles for society. We must ensure the participation within UNCCD not only of NGOs but also of the private sector and of the business community.

The same goes for Corporate Social Responsibility programmes. Companies must evaluate their business and must find more friendly solutions to prevent land degradation.

I believe civil society and its organizations will have a lot to do now, they will be more involved in the implementation or use of the monitoring system through local communities. They will also contribute to the country report and tap the situation to improve even further.

-What do you think of the Argentine NAP?

-I think it is a sound programme. As you know, once the Parties have adopted the Strategy, it is necessary to include a monitoring system within the NAP so as to monitor degradation and land improvements. The NAP must be duly aligned in this regard and we must ensure all countries work in this direction.

-How could you summarize your visit to Argentina?

-In the process of combating land degradation, I realize that there is a platform and that all political decision-makers sit at the discussion table. I congratulate you. Obviously there are challenges ahead but when you develop platforms and discuss them, such challenges turn into milestones.

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