Resolution on the EU objectives for the meeting of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, Madrid, 3-14 September 2007

2007/2616(RSP) - 06/09/2007 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

Following the debate which took place during the sitting of 6 September 2007, the European Parliament adopted a joint resolution presented by 7 political groups on the EU objectives for the 8th meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP8) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), being held in Madrid from 3 to 14 September 2007. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) estimates that desertification currently affects approximately twenty-five to thirty percent of the world's land surface area, and that between 1.2 and 2 billion people in at least 100 states are at risk. Parliament pointed out that economic losses due to lost productivity have been estimated at $ 42 billion in 1992 ($ 64 billion in 2006 prices), and that the global rate of desertification is increasing, leading to poverty, forced migration and conflict. It noted that desertification occurs mainly through over-cultivation, over-grazing, improper irrigation practices and deforestation. These activities arise from poor land management, which, in turn, often stems from the socio-economic conditions in which the farmers live.

Parliament expressed its support for the UNCCD and its reform process, and called on the Commission and Member States to present a unified position in the COP meeting, in close cooperation with ACP partners. Members called for the EU to engage constructively in the negotiation of the 10-year strategic plan in order to build strong mechanisms for an effective implementation of the Convention. In this connection, particular attention should be given to: achieving progress on the ground and in local communities; the synergies with achieving UNCCD and Millennium Development Goals; and capacity building beyond central level, focusing on local stakeholders. The role of civil society and local populations in the implementation and achievement of UNCCD objectives was emphasised.

Parliament also recommended organising **a Conference to assess the implementation and effectiveness of Action Plans** in the most affected regions, notably in Africa, before future Conferences of Parties. It voiced its concern at the **lack of committed funding for actions**, but welcomed the use of the Global Environment Facility as the Convention's financial mechanism and called for the EU to strengthen financing for measures against desertification in the context of flexible mechanisms under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol.

Since land degradation was a crucial hindering factor in the future development of affected countries, Parliament called for EU development policy to pay special attention to this phenomenon, including in the assessment of development assistance needs. Recent studies had come to the conclusion that the cost of investing in reducing land degradation in affected areas would be lower than the costs resulting from the degradation. Parliament was mindful of the long-term commitment needed for measures against desertification to be effective.

It went on to call for the following:

- the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy to introduce binding criteria on combating desertification and land degradation in the affected areas in the EU, as well as for a prevention and implementation policy in order to maintain people in the rural areas;

- comprehensive forest care to reduce as much as possible the fire load of forests and the spread and velocity of fires. Parliament pointed out that the recovered biomass could contribute to the economic feasibility of the operation;
- the Commission should consider the establishment of a European Drought Observatory, that would collect knowledge and propose mitigation and follow-up measures in order to minimise the effects of the droughts on Europe;
- the Commission and Member States must step up international cooperation in the implementation of the UNCCD by providing additional incentives and financial support, and support transboundary water cooperation programmes. This issue must be put on the agenda of the next EU-Africa summit.

Lastly, Parliament reiterated its resolution of 7 July 2005 on speeding up the implementation of the EU action plan on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) and its disappointment regarding the absence of compulsory and comprehensive regulations prohibiting the import of illegal and unsustainably harvested timber into the EU.