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REVIEW OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

(Item 5(e) of the provisional agenda)

Migration of Dust and Sandstorms in North-East Asia

Note by the Secretariat

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I. OVERVIEW OF PROGRESS IN THE SUBREGION

1. Recognising the serious threat of desertification decades ago, China is one of early countries in systematically conducting desertification research, and also the only country in the world with long-term desertification monitoring system in place. Long-term monitoring data is key in combating desertification as it provides the scientific basis in developing desertification combating and prevention plan, in particular on the selection of priority zones and prevention measures. In 2014, China kicked off the 5th National Desertification Monitoring utilising a combination of remote sensing and ground survey techniques, and is expected to be completed in June 2015.¹ This Monitoring work will support the evaluation of desertification control projects and their effectiveness; and to improve our understanding of climate change and anthropological impact on desertification.

2. At the same time, China has also been actively involved in international desertification discussions. The Intergovernmental Working Group on the Follow Up to the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (“Rio+20”) was held in Beijing during 16-18 July 2014, jointly organized by the UNCCD and State Forestry Administration, China.² The Meeting discussed on issues related to the global goal of “Zero Net Land Degradation (ZNLD) by 2030” including its scientific definition, measures to be taken and implications for UNCCD, etc. The State Forestry Administration suggested that China’s experience and progress in desertification control demonstrates that the ZNLD goal is achievable. The key aspects of Chinese approach involve combinations of: top-down (government-led) and bottom up (community participation) efforts; artificial control and natural restoration methods; statutory requirements and enabling policies; science and dedication; and ecological enhancement and social progress, etc.

3. Mongolia with about 77 percent of its territory threatened by desertification, has also taken multiple steps recently in addressing this challenge. In the Mongolian Green Development Plan endorsed by the Parliament in June 2014, national commitment has been made through stating that “Reduction of impacts from desertification, land degradation and drought by creating conditions to minimize human impacts on environment in climate change conditions and through rapid economic growth” as one of the measures to be implemented in achieving its strategic objectives.

4. Prior to the adoption of the Plan, the Atlas of Desertification has been published by the Ministry of Nature, Environment and Green Development.³ Studies have shown that the Steppe and western region in Mongolia is most affected by desertification and human activities directly contribute to 60 percent of desertification. The Atlas summarizes the status of scientific

¹ China Science <http://news.sciencenet.cn/sbhtmlnews/2014/6/287901.shtm>

² <http://hmfz.forestry.gov.cn/portal/zsb/s/982/content-689906.html>

³ <http://english.news.mn/content/156608.shtml>

knowledge in Mongolia and is key for sound policy-making and awareness raising at both national and local levels on combating desertification.

5. Apart from national efforts, the subregion has also cooperated through intergovernmental mechanisms as well as the civil society on a number of joint activities:

6. China, the Republic of Korea (ROK) and Mongolia have been sharing forest and related policies since 2007. The Korea Forest Service of the ROK, the State Forestry Administration of China, and the Ministry of Nature, Environment and Green Development of Mongolia hold the second North East Asia Deforestation, Land Degradation and Drought Network (DLDD-NEAN) meeting in Ulaanbaatar in December 2013.⁴ The Meeting discussed on upscaling network activity through conducting joint research, sharing experiences and information, and encouraging participation of the private sector and civil society. Joint projects on enhancing cooperation in preventing dust and sandstorms, and land restoration will take place in the near future, under which China will provide technical support and Mongolia will offer land and human resources. These projects will also seek financial aid from international organizations including the UN and the World Bank. The next DLDD-NEAN meeting will take place in China in later 2014.

7. The Korea-Mongolia Greenbelt Forestation Project, initiated in 2007, is an anti-desertification effort expected to create over 3,000 hectare of forest by 2016. It will be achieved through an extensive tree planting programme of selected poplar, pine, spruce, elm species running throughout the Lun Soum region and the Gobi Desert.^{5,6} The Korea Forest Service has also supported over 3.2 million desert willows and poplar trees to be planted across 1,200 hectares of the Gobi Desert in Inner Mongolia province of China.

8. At the 16th Tripartite Environment Ministers Meeting (TEMM) of China, Japan and the ROK took place in April 2014 in Daegu, the Meeting encouraged the exchange of relevant data (including hourly PM_{2.5} monitoring data) and publication of significant outcomes from the cooperation activities; and agreed to link the three countries' dust and sandstorms (DSS) forecasting website at the TEMM website.⁷ The Mid-Term Strategy for Working Group II of the Joint Research on Dust and Sandstorms has also been adopted, and the ROK will draft the mid-term joint research action plans (2015-2019) for WGI and WGII.

9. More recently during the Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Seoul in July 2014, the Ministry of Environment of the ROK and the Ministry of Environmental Protection of China

⁴ <http://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/Policies/view?articleId=116583>

⁵ <http://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/Policies/view?articleId=119343>

⁶ <http://www.oloo.mn/n/2178/html>

⁷ Joint Communique, the 16th Tripartite Environment Ministers Meeting Among Korea, China and Japan, 28-29 April 2014, Daegu, Korea

signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with a wide scope of cooperation including information sharing, joint research, training programmes, joint seminars and workshop, etc. A specific article in the MoU has been dedicated to strengthening cooperation on reducing DSS and desertification through establishing DSS monitoring network and ecosystem restoration, etc. Under this MoU, the two countries also agreed to make efforts for the involvement of relevant international organizations in these activities.

10. In addition to intergovernmental cooperation, civil society in the subregion has also been active in fighting desertification. In the arid lands of Mongolia, the Green Asia Network (GAN) has trained 2,800 locals in forestry practices and sustainable agriculture to restore degraded lands and improve the livelihoods of 14,000 people.⁸ Over 25,000 volunteers (of which 21,700 from Mongolia and 3,700 from the ROK) were brought together to work on sustainable land management projects. About 450,000 trees were planted in Mongolia across six sites greening a total area of approximately 450 hectares. GAN also operates eco-tours, giving an upfront look at climate change impact and allows participants to work on forestry projects. GAN is one of the three winners of the 2014 Land for Life Award,⁹ which is a collaborative initiative between UNCCD and a number of its national partners. The Award launched by UNCCD in 2011, *“recognizes efforts that promote the national health and productivity of the earth’s soil”* and these efforts are acknowledged as they are regarded as *“lifesaving and provide sustainability and a better life for all, particularly to the poorest communities in the world.”*

II. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

11. With consideration of the requests at SOM-17 and SOM-18 on wider engagement of member States and other existing mechanisms, as well as to increase knowledge sharing, the Meeting may wish to request member States to provide their views on conducting international seminars and workshops on combating desertification.

12. The Meeting may wish to invite member States to indicate their intended contributions to the development and implementation of joint activities in the field of desertification.

13. The Meeting may wish to invite member States to share their views and intentions on NEASPEC approaches and activities to be conducted in the field of desertification.

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⁸ <http://www.unccd.int/en/media-center/Press-Releases/Pages/Press-Release-Detail.aspx?PRId=60>

⁹ <http://www.unccd.int/en/programmes/Event-and-campaigns/LandForLife/Pages/default.aspx>