

positions succeeded in transforming the discussions into a highly-polarized debate for much of the negotiations. The moderates who made up the majority in both North and South were only able to regain the upper hand toward the end of the negotiations, when insufficient time remained to conclude.

At the end of PrepCom IV, at least 25 percent of the text still remained to be negotiated. In addition, delegates left the final PrepCom without defining a procedure to complete negotiation of the text and therefore some mechanism to wrap-up negotiations will have to be determined during the intersessional period.

DESERTIFICATION

The issue of desertification was known at the outset of PrepCom IV to be of great interest to the African nations, which considered that the subject had received inadequate attention at previous PrepComs. The African Group demonstrated the importance which its members attached to the item by submitting a series of revisions to the Secretariat document. The African text, which contained a wide range of largely non-controversial, well-considered, technically-substantive additions, was warmly received by all delegations and quickly became the focus of the debate on desertification.

While the main body of the report, including the African proposals, was adopted with relative ease, the debate on desertification was marked with one controversy which developed into one of the primary sticking-points of PrepCom IV: a Convention on Desertification. An accommodation was found to address the concern of other countries affected by desertification, by expanding the original African proposal of a convention for Africa to a global convention with regional protocols, with priority to Africa. However, throughout the proceedings of the PrepCom, most donor nations were unconvinced that a convention was the sole option for combatting desertification, as strongly asserted by the African Group. Despite numerous attempts to reach consensus, lack of flexibility on the part of African Group and continuing scepticism within the donor delegations resulted in an impasse. The June Rio Conference will therefore be considering a bracketed section within the Desertification Agenda 21 item proposing a global convention for desertification.