



Issue 2.4 | July-August 2010

Special Issue: Launching the UN Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification

Fifteen leaders pledge their commitment –
and the backing of their organizations

FROM THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

Partners, heart and strategy: the elements of a new decade of achievement

Deserts and desertification must not be confused. They are linked yet separate: natural deserts make up an important part the earth's ecosystems, while desertification is what happens when once-healthy landscapes in dryland areas turn barren from human mismanagement and worsening drought. Sometimes, as in north-eastern China and other growing dustbowls of the world, sand spreads into these landscapes, turning them desert-like.



Coastline near Fortaleza

The UN Decade is to be launched at the International Conference: Climate, Sustainability and Development in Semi-Arid Regions (ICID 2010), 16-20 August 2010, Fortaleza, Brazil.

ICID 2010 is jointly sponsored by the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Center for Strategic Studies and Management (CGEE), Brasilia, and the Government of the State of Ceará.

But desertified land can be restored – and the world is working together as never before both to deepen our scientific understanding and strengthen practical ways to tackle this truly global challenge.

I am heartened by the support for this cause that is shown below by ministers from the Americas, Asia, Africa and Europe, by the

UN Secretary General and by the leaders of United Nations agencies. I am deeply grateful to the government of Brazil, the host of the launch of the UN Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (UNDDD) at ICID 2010 in Fortaleza. And I am certain that in the coming months and years, guided by friends, allies and our 2008-2018 Strategy, the value of our Convention as an instrument of human development, environmental stewardship and economic innovation will only grow.

Luc Gnacadja, Executive Secretary

Ban Ki-moon

United Nations Secretary-General
Page 2

Homero Bibiloni

Secretary of Environment
and Sustainable Development,
Argentina
Page 3

Dirk Niebel

Federal Minister of Economic Co-
operation and Development, Germany
Page 4

Cherif Rahmani

Minister of Land Management,
Environment and Tourism, Algeria
Page 5

Pema Gyamtsho

Minister of Agriculture and Forests,
Bhutan
Page 6

Jacques Diouf

Director-General of the Food
and Agriculture Organization of
United Nations (FAO)
Page 7

Achim Steiner

UN Under-Secretary-General;
Executive Director, United Nations
Environment Programme (UNEP)
Page 8

Kiyo Akasaka

Under-Secretary-General
for Communications and Public
Information, UNDP
Page 9

Olav Kjørven

Assistant Administrator and Director,
Bureau for Development Policy, United
Nations Development Programme
(UNDP)
Page 10

Michel Jarraud

Secretary-General, World
Meteorological Organization (WMO)
Page 11

Kanayo Nwanze

President, The International Fund
for Agricultural Development (IFAD)
Page 12

Ahmed Djoghlaif

Executive Secretary, Convention
on Biological Diversity (CBD)
Page 13

Christiana Figueres

Executive Secretary, UN Framework
Convention on Climate Change
(UNFCCC)
Page 14

Christian Mersmann

Managing Director,
The Global Mechanism, UNCCD
Page 15

Byong Hyon Kwon

UNCCD Greening Ambassador;
President, Future Forest,
Republic of Korea
Page 16

Across the globe, efforts to rehabilitate drylands are showing results

More than 2 billion people live in the world's drylands. The vast majority live on less than one dollar a day and without adequate access to fresh water. Almost three-quarters of rangelands show various symptoms of desertification. Continued land degradation – whether from climate change, unsustainable agriculture or poor management of water resources – is a threat to food security, leading to starvation among the most acutely affected communities and robbing the world of productive land.

Land degradation also poses growing social costs. Increased competition for depleted dryland resources can generate localized conflict and broader tensions. The forced migration of millions of people creates the risk of social breakdown in the traditional lands they leave behind and instability in the increasingly crowded urban areas to which they go in search of jobs, shelter and services.

These are formidable challenges. But they are not intractable. Across the globe, efforts to rehabilitate drylands are showing results. By providing sustained assistance to local communities, we can preserve or recover millions of hectares of land, reduce vulnerability to climate change and alleviate hunger and poverty for one-third of humanity.

Desertification and land degradation are global problems that require a global response. As we begin the Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification, let us pledge to intensify our efforts to nurture the land we need for achieving the Millennium Development Goals and guaranteeing human well-being.

.....

Ban Ki-Moon was elected by the UN General Assembly on 13 October 2006 as the eighth Secretary-General of the United Nations.



A new Decade to prompt action

The United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (UNDDD) will run to December 2020. Its aim is to raise awareness and prompt action that will protect the world's drylands from further deterioration and degradation.

UNDDD's launch at ICID 2010 in Fortaleza, Brazil, on 16 August, 2010, will be complemented by regional launches elsewhere in the world, from September to November 2010.

Planning and organization of events is spearheaded by the Secretariat of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, in Bonn, Germany, in collaboration with the Department of Public Information (DPI) of the UN Secretariat in New York, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and other relevant UN bodies.

.....

More on the Decade at <http://unddd.unccd.int>



An escalating global commitment

Drylands and deserts form one of the most important ecosystems of the world. They contain an incredible diversity of fauna and flora adapted to extreme weather. Humans, too, have learned to adapt to and coexist with the drylands, but over the last 200 years our mistreatment of the land and neglect of soil conservation have markedly intensified. With all their beauty, wealth and fragility, the natural habitats of the drylands form a unique heritage. Protecting them has never been more urgent or important.

Properly treated, the drylands can be good lands: there's a fundamental difference between valuable drylands ecosystems and the desertification process they are subjected to. It is the latter that causes loss of biological productivity and, consequently, a loss of livelihoods among the people that inhabit the drylands.

The drylands represent more than 50% of global agricultural production, thus making an incalculably valuable contribution to global food security. At the same time, the drylands hold more than half of the world's poorest people, but only 8% of the world's known reserves of water. Already now the degradation of growing parts of the drylands threatens thousands of environmentally displaced persons with starvation.

This vulnerability means heightened suffering for drylands economies and social systems from global warming: long-term droughts, floods, irreversible soil erosion, deterioration of agro-biodiversity, and the spread of pests and animal diseases. All of these factors affect food production and human health, and they are most prevalent in developing countries.

Increasingly, the quality of life for many inhabitants of this planet will depend crucially on the decisions we all take and the efforts we make now to improve matters. We need a synergistic, holistic approach to sustainable development. Our work henceforth must be founded upon a paradigm embracing economic production, qualified employment and social inclusion as well as the environment. Only thus can we address the broadest demands of human society and achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

In this, let me highlight the unique approach of the United Nations Conventions to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) on this challenge, a perspective focusing primarily on livelihoods and the development of people living in neglected drylands regions all across the world. I commend the initiative adopted by the Resolution A/RES/64/201 of the United Nations General Assembly to declare 2010-2020 the Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification. Let this Decade be a main driver of an escalating global commitment to address this problem.

.....

As part of his duties in the government of Argentina, Secretary Bibiloni also chaired the 9th Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD (COP9) in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from 21 September to 2 October, 2009. He is currently chairman of the COP9 Bureau.



There's a fundamental difference between valuable drylands ecosystems and the desertification process they are subjected to.

Soil degradation can be prevented

When it was adopted in 1994, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification was seen as an approach to solving the regional problems of soil degradation, particularly in Africa. Since then, that perception has changed fundamentally. Desertification is now seen as a global challenge, threatening humanity as a whole.

Demand for food is growing worldwide, and, according to FAO estimates, will rise 50% by 2030. At the same time, there is increasing destruction of fertile soil and agricultural land. We are summoned to promote sustainable forms of land use and not leave the poorest countries to their own resources in this struggle. If we do not succeed, then poverty and food insecurity will lead to increased potential for conflict and a growing number of environmental refugees.

The global environmental problems of biodiversity loss, climate change and soil degradation are closely connected and can only be solved together. Desertification processes accelerate climate change, and climate change will have a particularly significant impact on the population in the arid zones. Inappropriate land use worsens the loss of biodiversity, reduces the scope for ecosystem services and so deprives the inhabitants of rural arid zones of their livelihood.

Germany is supporting the affected countries in combating desertification. Extensive experience has shown that soil degradation can be prevented. For example, German support for erosion protection and sustainable resource management measures in Burkina Faso has produced impressive results. 60,000 hectares of arable land has been protected by stone walls. This has made it possible to increase annual harvest yields by 250 kg of grain per hectare. 40,000 families have increased their income on a long-term basis and improved their nutritional situation.

However, long-term success in combating desertification can only be achieved with the necessary political will and by creating a supportive political framework. For example, in Niger's Zinder region, there were relatively few trees thirty years ago. The government decided to change legislation on agricultural, and today farmers own trees which they have planted themselves. This incentive has led to the growth of approximately 15 million new trees in this region.

An economic approach is central to the sustainable use of natural resources. Even in arid zones, private sector involvement is possible and can be harnessed for development processes. The indigenous people of the Kalahari have traditionally used devil's claw (*harpagophytum procumbens*) for medicinal purposes. Today, the roots of the devil's claw plant are exported to numerous pharmaceutical companies all over the world, which process them for the treatment of diseases like rheumatism and arthritis. German development cooperation has promoted sustainable gathering of devil's claw, and contributed to ensuring that initial processing is carried out in the collectors' villages. This means higher prices and accordingly a higher income for the collectors.

This example shows the need for a more economic approach. The highly-regarded Stern Report has shown how important it is for political decision makers to understand the economic dimension of global environmental challenges. So far, there has been no comparable report on the value of soil, specifically in arid zones. This is why Germany is supporting the initiative of the UNCCD Secretariat to carry out an economic evaluation of desertification and soil degradation. In addition, we should follow the example of the campaigns for biodiversity conservation and



Even in arid zones, private sector involvement is possible and can be harnessed for development processes.

climate protection by increasing our efforts to mobilise private sector funds to combat soil degradation and to establish partnerships for this purpose.

The German Federal Government will continue to support its partner countries in the areas of erosion protection, sustainable land management and rural development in arid zones.

Germany's commitment at the 2009 G8 summit in L'Aquila of EUR 2.1 billion for the development of rural areas underscores this determination. The promised funds are setting important priorities in development policy and will primarily go to concrete projects and programmes in bilateral cooperation.

.....

More information on the approach of Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development to desertification: www.bmz.de/en/what_we_do/issues/Environment/soils/index.html?follow=adword

CHERIF RAHMANI
Minister of Land Management, Environment and Tourism, Algeria

Algeria will spare no effort

It gives me particular pleasure to express my sincere thanks to the UNCCD for the interest it has unfailingly shown for all countries affected by desertification, and towards Algeria in particular.

I thus seize the opportunity of the launch of the Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification to reiterate, in my capacity as Minister for Territorial Planning and the Environment and President of the Foundation for the Deserts, the commitment of the government of the Democratic and Peoples Republic of Algeria to spare no effort in contributing all we can to the Executive Secretary of the UNCCD and in working together with all partners of the UN system to celebrate and promote this event.

I trust that together we will find the very best ways and means to develop and reinforce our cooperation so as to achieve the objectives of the Convention and of the Decade.

.....

Minister Rahmani is one of the prime movers behind the Decade. At a joint international conference titled "Desertification and the international policy imperative" in December 2006 in Algiers, high-level representatives formally endorsed a proposal by Minister Rahmani and other Arab ministers that the UN General Assembly name 2010-2020 as a decade for deserts and desertification.



Despite “Gross National Happiness”, a fragile environment and increasing challenges

Bhutan, as a small, land-locked mountainous country located in the eastern Himalayas, is highly vulnerable to land degradation from soil erosion, landslides, flash floods, drought and wind storms. In spite of this situation, it has managed to maintain a relatively healthy environment in line with its philosophy of “Gross National Happiness”, which promotes the need to balance economic development with ecological and cultural preservation.

Today, the country has a forest cover of over 72% that provides safe haven for a rich diversity of plants and animals while at the same time achieving a healthy annual economic growth rate of around 6%. However, with a growing population and concurrent demands on limited land resources as well as changing climate patterns, the country is likely to face increasing challenges in protecting its fragile environment.

Realizing the need to better manage our land resources, Bhutan became a party to the UNCCD in 2003. Since then, my country has been able to access Global Environmental Facility (GEF) funds with support from the World Bank and the UNDP to mainstream sustainable land management principles as part of our National Action Programme (NAP) under the Convention. This support has enabled us to initiate pioneering projects to test and adopt various measures to prevent land degradation and improve land husbandry.

The Royal Government of Bhutan recognizes that the UNCCD is now becoming even more relevant in view of the emerging challenges that many nations are facing, and is proud to be its member. In this context, it gives me great pleasure to convey, on behalf of the people and government of Bhutan, our warmest felicitations to UNCCD on the occasion of the global launch of the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (UNDDD) on 16 August 2010.

During this decade 2010-2020 and beyond, I would like to urge world leaders, scientists and farmers to work together in innovating technologies and approaches to arrest the process of land degradation and desertification both within and beyond the context of the Convention.

Tashi Delek!

.....

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forests of the Royal Government of Bhutan works to enhance food security, improve access to food and its effective distribution, marketing and import, enhance sustainable rural livelihoods, and promote sustainable utilisation of arable land, forest and water resources: www.moa.gov.bt/moa/main/index.php

Note: “Tashi Delek” is a Tibetan phrase of greeting also used in Bhutan, Nepal and Sikkim. Hard to translate, it means approximately “May good luck and blessings come to this place”.



Bhutan’s adherence to the UNCCD has led to support from the Global Environment Facility, the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to prevent land degradation and improve land husbandry.

A “Decade” for the healthy future of humanity

The decade to come will be critical for humanity. The world population will continue on its unprecedented upward trajectory while natural resources will become increasingly shrunken and threatened, particularly in the drylands. FAO very much welcomes and supports the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification, which we anticipate will catalyze greater collaborative efforts for combating land degradation in the drylands. For FAO, the fight against desertification is also a fight against rural poverty and food insecurity, all of which are strongly interrelated.

The common response to tackle these development urgencies is already well known, and is reliant upon the mainstreaming and upscaling of sustainable land and water management. Today a number of “win-win practices” are available, based on sustainable intensification and agro-ecological principles. These must be implemented over large areas and include, for example, conservation agriculture and no-tillage techniques; crop rotations and intercropping; integrated pest management; agro-forestry and afforestation schemes and pasture improvement with planned grazing processes. Also, in the context of climate change and drought in drylands, improved water management has become absolutely essential, and requires a major effort for the implementation of water harvesting and micro-irrigation investments, at watershed and village level.

FAO would like to propose that development partners and governments come together during the next decade to strengthen national programmes and investment frameworks on agriculture and land and water resources that would target at the same time a dramatic increase of land productivity and, in particular, food production and the rehabilitation of soils, water resources and ecosystems.

These programmes should build collaboration among the ministries concerned: agriculture, water, rural development, energy, environment, finance and planning. The programmes should also strengthen farmer and pastoralist organizations, along with decentralized capacities. They should promote secured land tenure arrangements, new market opportunities, including green products, as well as participatory land-use planning, research and extension programmes.

FAO has very solid knowledge, capabilities and experience in all these areas. We stand ready to make the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification a success for the benefit of all and for a healthy future of humanity.

.....

The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) leads international efforts to defeat hunger. Serving both developed and developing countries, FAO is a source of knowledge and information, helping countries modernize and improve agriculture, forestry and fisheries practices and ensure good nutrition for all: www.fao.org/about/en/

Photo: ©FAO/Giulio Napolitano



The world population will continue on its unprecedented upward trajectory while natural resources will become increasingly shrunken and threatened, particularly in the drylands.

Future threats are with us now

In the second decade of the 21st century many of the theoretical concerns of the past have become the concrete challenges of the present. Climate change, rapid loss of biodiversity, ecosystem degradation and rising natural resource scarcity are no longer future threats: they are with us now.

Land degradation is part and parcel of this suite of challenges that can no longer be seen in isolation. They request and require a sharply elevated effort, and a smarter and more intelligent response by the international community and societies everywhere, if six billion people, rising to nine billion by 2050, are to thrive in, let alone survive this century.

The facts and figures are sobering: at the global level, desertification has reached 3.6 billion hectares, accounting for 25 percent of the Earth's terrestrial land mass. Land degradation threatens nearly a billion people in some 100 countries, causing US\$42 billion in losses every year.

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA) report predicts that if the current trend continues without us taking action to reverse the trend, ecosystem services of the drylands and deserts will disintegrate further and in turn jeopardize the livelihoods of the many poor communities that dwell in the drylands and desert ecosystems. The foreseeable consequences are that the world will not be able to deliver on the poverty alleviation and ecological sustainability objectives of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 and beyond without a dramatic change of course.

It is not however all doom and gloom: efforts are being made to address land degradation and desertification with positive outcomes, but more action in policy and work on the ground are needed to arrest and reverse the land degradation and desertification processes.

The Green Economy Initiative of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and partners is also addressing the economics and the smart market mechanisms that may unlock and embed sustainability into the equation, not least in areas such as improved freshwater management and sustainable agriculture.

The urgency of desertification and land degradation prompted member states of the United Nations to adopt in 2009 a resolution to dedicate 2010-2020 as a decade to combat desertification, which reinforces the necessity to move from ideals to actions.

UNEP has been working with countries and other partners for some time now in efforts to control land degradation and desertification. A renewed partnership has been established with the Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and other partners to work collectively on the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (UNDDD). UNEP believes that cooperation among various institutions and partners can draw upon one another's strengths and mobilize scarce resources and above all human ingenuity towards a collective effort in systematically and permanently combating land degradation and desertification.

.....

The mission of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is to provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations: www.unep.org



The world will not be able to deliver on the poverty alleviation and ecological sustainability objectives of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 and beyond without a dramatic change of course.

The drylands need special attention

For most of the world's people, desertification may seem like a distant problem — one for those living in the reaches of the Sahara, Gobi, Kalahari and Mojave deserts, for example. In fact, the drylands are habitable areas that tend to be more arid, and two billion people — almost one third of the world's population — call them home. More and more frequently, however, these lands are becoming degraded. Without action, their deterioration will worsen through mismanagement, climate change, and scarcity of water.

Unfortunately, unless there is a major famine or drought, this problem hardly ever generates headlines. Desertification is, after all, a slow process. Over a period of years, the rains come less often, the topsoil gradually degrades, and the land is increasingly unable to support agriculture, grazing, the livelihoods and thus the communities that depend on the land.

Another reason why the drylands may not be high on the international agenda is that more than half of the peoples who live in these regions — 1.2 billion — are among the world's poorest. Of the countries facing the the greatest difficulties in achieving the poverty-reduction targets of the Millennium Development Goals, many are in the drylands.

But drylands are an urgent concern for all of us. Land degradation is advancing in many other regions often not mentioned in the same breath as desertification. Across the Mediterranean, Australia, the southwest United States, and parts of South America and central Asia, communities increasingly face a new set of problems caused by extended droughts, shifting climate, and outdated land management techniques. The launch of the Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification in the port city of Fortaleza, Brazil, in the drought-prone north-east of a country that mistakenly features in the public imagination as an endless rain-forest, will help us understand why the drylands need special attention.

The Decade offers an important opportunity to put the issue before the public. The issues facing the drylands, after all, represent the acute convergence of a wide range of challenges that must be faced globally — poverty reduction and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, economic growth, food security, climate change, land use, water management, and good governance.

In addition, the Decade should help focus attention on the tools that we already have at our disposal, such as the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, to address the myriad concerns that we face. Though the Convention has historically been under-financed, it represents one of the most ambitious community-based development approaches ever articulated.

The United Nations Department of Public Information is committed to joining its partners throughout the UN System and in governments, civil society and the private sector in using the Decade to promote awareness and sustainable development in the drylands. We will work to ensure that desertification is embraced by the discussions on the Millennium Development Goals, on climate change, on the green economy and on the road to Rio+20. It must become an issue that is of concern to all.

.....

The UN Department of Public Information (UNDPI) promotes global awareness and greater understanding of the work of the United Nations, using radio, television, print, the Internet, videoconferencing and other new information technology: unic.un.org/aroundworld/unics/en



Dryland communities increasingly face a new set of problems caused by extended drought, shifting climate, and outdated land management techniques.

Progress in drylands crucial to the MDGs

Drylands cover more than 40% of the surface of our earth. Over one billion people from the developing world depend on the drylands for their livelihoods. Many of them live in countries that are among the poorest in the world and are at serious risk of food insecurity. Climate change will further aggravate their vulnerability. Achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will not be possible by 2015 if the poor of the drylands are overlooked.

Despite the many challenges faced by people living in drylands, their future can be much brighter. What has been lacking for years is sufficient attention to the particular development challenges faced by the people living in drylands. This, in turn is largely due to a lack of understanding of their needs and potential to contribute to national economic development.

This year marks the launch of the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (2010-2020), an important occasion to raise awareness about the opportunities and challenges faced by dryland countries and to mobilize support and build partnerships at the global, regional, national and local levels for development in drylands.

This launch is also taking place at a time when the international community is preparing for the 2010 MDG Summit. The Summit is expected to re-energize global efforts to accelerate progress towards the MDGs and will give us the opportunity to mobilize support to reverse the current trends and bring true development to the drylands. Sustainable development in drylands will require improving the capacity of populations living in drylands to both survive and thrive in spite of environmental and other constraints. It will also require mainstreaming of drylands issues into national development agendas.

Capacity development is at the core of UNDP's work. We are working with governments, civil society organizations and communities living in drylands to build their capacity to develop and manage programmes that can reduce their vulnerability, improve their resilience and enhance livelihoods while ensuring sustainable natural resources management.

UNDP is committed to supporting dryland countries' efforts to implement the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), which offers an opportunity to make progress on the MDGs specifically in drylands. In recognition of this, UNDP is working in partnership with the UNCCD Secretariat and others to support the implementation of the Convention's 10-year Strategic Plan. Together, we hope that the coming decade will see significant progress in bringing the benefits of development to those people who call the drylands their home.

.....

Active in 166 countries, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the UN's global development network, an organization advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life. UNDP's Drylands Development Centre specializes in assisting countries to fight poverty and encourage development in the drier parts of the world: www.undp.org/drylands



UNDP is committed to supporting dryland countries' efforts to implement the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, which offers an opportunity to make progress on the MDGs specifically in drylands.

An active player in international efforts to combat desertification

I wish to thank UNCCD Executive Secretary Luc Gnacadja for inviting WMO to contribute to the launching of the 2010-2020 United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (UNDDD).

WMO has a long record, dating back to the tragic 1968-1974 Sahel droughts, of actively taking part in all international efforts to combat desertification. WMO participated in the historic United Nations Conference on Desertification (Nairobi, 1977), which WMO further supported through its own Plan of Action on the meteorological and hydrological aspects of combating desertification.

When the need became compelling for a comprehensive and legally-binding international agreement within the framework of sustainable development, WMO was represented at all sessions of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the UNCCD and took an active part in Convention preparatory work. In particular, WMO contributed to the Convention's official definition of desertification as "land degradation in arid, semi-arid, and sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities".

WMO also established or supported, as appropriate, a number of regional Drought Monitoring Centres: the Nairobi IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre, the Harare SADC Drought Monitoring Centre for Eastern and Southern Africa and the Ljubljana DMCSEE Drought Management Centre for South-Eastern Europe.

Today, the partnership between WMO and UNCCD is stronger than ever. Following the publication in 2007 by the WMO-UNEP Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) of its Fourth Assessment Report, there is much higher awareness of climate variability and change and the associated risks and vulnerabilities, including desertification.

In 2009, the third World Climate Conference-3 (WCC-3), convened in Geneva by WMO with its partners, unanimously approved the establishment of a Global Framework for Climate Services (GFCS), for which a High-level Taskforce (HLT) is actively developing proposals to be submitted to the Sixteenth World Meteorological Congress in 2011. WCC-3 brought together 13 heads of state and government, and more than 100 ministers and agency heads, as well as 2,500 scientists, experts and decision-makers. During this session the UNCCD Deputy Executive Secretary noted the willingness of UNCCD to contribute to the GFCS through its thematic programme at the regional level and by establishing desertification monitoring centres.

I therefore would like to seize this opportunity to reiterate WMO's most sincere appreciation to UNCCD, on this auspicious occasion, and to wish the Second International Conference: Climate, Sustainability and Development in Semi-arid Regions a most successful outcome.

.....

The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), a specialised agency of the United Nations, is the UN system's authoritative voice on the state and behaviour of the Earth's atmosphere, its interaction with the oceans, the climate it produces and the resulting distribution of water resources: www.wmo.int/pages/about



Today... there is a much higher awareness of climate variability and change and the associated risks and vulnerabilities, including desertification.

Thousands of success stories highlight UN work

At IFAD we are confronted every day by the human cost of desertification and land degradation. We work with subsistence farmers, nomadic herders, day labourers and others whose survival depends on ecologically fragile or marginal lands. Through our work over the past 30 years, it has become clear that to eliminate rural poverty we must also address the issue of how land and natural resources are managed.

The Bedouin communities in the Badia rangelands can attest to the importance of halting desertification. Covering 10 million hectares of central and eastern Syria, the area is known for its poor soils and low rainfall. Bedouin communities herd about 12 million animals here.

After years of severe drought and intensive grazing, the Badia was badly degraded. Today, an IFAD-supported project has restored vegetation in about one-third of the Badia rangelands. The Bedouin herders, with their extensive local knowledge, worked with project experts to draft and implement management plans, determining how many animals should graze in a given area at a given time.

The project took three approaches to rehabilitation: resting, reseeded and planting. More than 930,000 hectares of the Badia have been regenerated by resting, a further 225,000 have been reseeded, and about 94,000 hectares have been planted with nursery shrubs. Breeders have seen the average productivity of the land increase as much as tenfold, from 50 to 500 feed units per hectare. Native plants that had long since disappeared have returned. Rehabilitation has not only provided fodder, it has led to a healthier ecosystem; birds, insects and animals have started to return to the area.

This is just one of the thousands of success stories that highlight the importance of programmes that United Nations agencies undertake to slow desertification and protect the world's drylands from degradation.

As the world grows warmer and biodiversity declines, there is an added urgency to make natural resource management an investment priority. The United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification will bring global attention to this important issue.

When governments, UN agencies and other partners work together, we can ensure that experiences like those of the Bedouin communities in the Badia rangelands become the rule – and not the exception.

.....

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) is a specialised agency of the United Nations and is dedicated to eradicating rural poverty. IFAD focuses on country-specific solutions, which can involve increasing rural poor peoples' access to financial services, markets, technology, land and other natural resources: www.ifad.org



An IFAD-supported project has restored vegetation and wildlife in more than 3 million hectares of the Badia rangelands in central and eastern Syria.

A crucial period in the fight to protect and preserve our natural resource base

The Convention on Biological Diversity welcomes the declaration and launch of the 2010-2020 United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification. This initiative is an excellent opportunity to promote synergies between the three Rio Conventions (CBD, UNCCD and UNFCCC), because biodiversity loss and desertification are interrelated. Desertification negatively affects biodiversity, through habitat degradation and the reduction of ecosystem productivity. At the same time, biodiversity loss increases the vulnerability of ecosystem to desertification.

The Decade will also highlight one of the most beautiful and vulnerable ecosystems on the planet. Although deserts are often perceived as wastelands of little value, the species and ecosystem services found in deserts are unique and invaluable. As so memorably put by Edward Abbey, a US author, essayist and passionate advocate of environmental issues, "...the strangeness and wonder of existence are emphasized here, in the desert..."

Desertification and biodiversity loss are exacerbated by climate change, which is threatening the delicate climatic balance under which desert species have evolved. In fact, desert ecosystems have been identified as being among the most vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change. While some species are adapting naturally, for example by shifting their habitats and the timing of life-history events, the ability of many desert species to adapt will soon be overcome by the pace and extent of climate change coupled with pressures from desertification.

The rapid rate at which desertification, biodiversity loss and climate change are taking place makes the next ten years a crucial period in the fight to protect and preserve our natural resource base. The Decade coincides with the time-frame of CBD's new strategic plan, which will be finalized this October at our tenth Conference of the Parties in Nagoya, Japan. Our new strategic plan will comprehensively address the causes and consequences of biodiversity loss – one of which is land degradation/desertification.

With this in mind, the 2010-2020 United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification will no doubt serve as a rallying point for all three Rio Conventions as we communally work toward important events such as the Rio+20 Summit in 2012 and the Millennium Development Goals Review in 2015. Only by actively looking toward the horizon will we be able to achieve our common goal of ensuring humankind's long-term well-being and prosperity on planet Earth.

.....

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) entered into force in 1993. Its three main objectives are the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of the components of biological diversity and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources: www.cbd.int



Desert ecosystems have been identified as being among the most vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change.

Action needs to be accelerated

Over the past decades, global average temperatures have indisputably risen due to climate change. In tandem with rising global temperatures, the number and extent of droughts have also risen. Left on their current trajectories, global greenhouse gas emissions will lead to significantly higher temperatures and to significantly more damage to lands, crops, forests and water supply, with dire consequences for food security and for society at large. It is therefore of paramount importance that the international community take the necessary steps to rein in emissions.

Action at scale that can significantly reduce greenhouse emissions needs to be accelerated, and we need to scale up global cooperative action and enhance partnerships at all levels to do so. In this context, UNFCCC and UNCCD share important areas of common interest and synergy between climate change action and action on desertification.

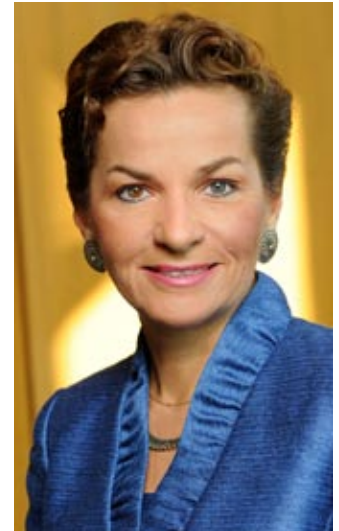
Not least, there are huge potential co-benefits in taking action in the areas of agriculture and forestry, both for the climate and for combating desertification. This particularly holds true for developing countries. For example, promoting forestry programmes and reducing emissions from deforestation has important co-benefits in terms of preventing land degradation and for increasing the adaptive capacity of local populations. Another example is agriculture. Good practices in the agricultural sector that increase the ability of soils to absorb greenhouse gases have the additional effect of preventing land degradation.

In the UN climate change negotiations, convergence is emerging that developing countries can undertake nationally appropriate mitigation actions with international support, provided that such actions and support can be measured, reported and verified. Importantly in this context, it is becoming increasingly clear that actions addressing issues related to land, including through reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, can be essential parts of developing countries' mitigation actions.

The United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification will be a major opportunity for the international community to strengthen the ability of countries to sustainably manage their lands, support them in their activities to halt land degradation and desertification and enhance the benefits for climate and sustainable development. All the governments and civil society organisations involved in tackling these inter-related issues have a huge responsibility to provide an adequate response, strong enough to safeguard the future of all people on this planet.

.....

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was adopted in 1992. With 194 Parties, the Convention enjoys near-universal membership. Its ultimate objective is to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere. The Convention is complemented by the 1997 Kyoto Protocol: unfccc.int



In the world's efforts to tackle climate change and desertification, UNFCCC and UNCCD share important areas of common interest and synergy.

Unleash the potential

Deserts and drylands, the most vulnerable production systems for sustainable agriculture and forests, are at the heart of this century's greatest development challenges, integral to the wealth of nations and the well-being of future generations.

Far too often, however, these vital ecosystems have been cast aside as “unproductive, barren wastelands”, their potential limited to subsistence food production. Consequently, deserts and drylands have been mistakenly marginalised in political decision-making and budgetary allocation processes. There is, however, a growing realisation by governments in developing countries and the international community that swift action must be taken to halt their further degradation. For the truth is that both deserts and drylands can help secure sustainable livelihoods and economic growth within rural communities, and it is high time to unleash their considerable potential.

In spite of Africa's vast promise in agricultural production, the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) says that food imports into the African continent currently total USD 33 billion annually. We must ensure that the untapped potential of the drylands is fully integrated into broad efforts to achieve long-term food security and national food sovereignty, objectives that make far greater macro-economic sense than short-term solutions based on large food imports.

From a global perspective, drylands are central to the fight against climate change, performing a precious environmental service as carbon sinks. Furthermore, sustainable agriculture and forest management for the benefit of deserts and drylands inhabitants make a significant contribution to biodiversity conservation in these fragile ecosystems. Ensuring sustainability in drylands is vital, too, in stemming the increasing waves of environmental migrants from degraded and resource-scarce areas, a social issue with a great impact on urban poverty.

The overwhelming challenge we face over the next ten years of the UN Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification is to engender a paradigm shift, one that recognizes the true value of deserts and drylands in both economic and social terms. More than ever before, compelling cases must be put forward to position these issues high on the political agenda, particularly at national level, and to attract much needed investment. It is becoming abundantly clear that international development cooperation simply does not suffice in meeting the required investments. Governments must dedicate greater resources from their domestic budgets to tackle the issue.

The UN Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification signals a political and strategic opportunity to recast the image of deserts and drylands as productive ecosystems at the macro-economic heart of countries' development. The future of deserts and drylands is both a national and a global responsibility. It is the political mandate of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) to ensure that they flourish.

.....

The Global Mechanism of the UNCCD advises the country Parties to the UNCCD on ways to scale up finance for sustainable land management (SLM): global-mechanism.org/about-us



The UN Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification must engender a paradigm shift, one that recognizes the true value of deserts and drylands in both economic and social terms.

BYONG HYON KWON

UNCCD Sustainable Land Management Champion and Greening Ambassador

President of Future Forest, Republic of Korea

A desperate fight in China starts to pay off

In my capacity as the UNCCD's Sustainable Land Management Champion and Greening Ambassador, I am honoured to send a message of strong support to the UN Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification.

When I first arrived in Beijing as Ambassador of the Republic of Korea 12 years ago, I was met with a thick sand storm. The following day I received a call from my daughter in Seoul, saying that the same sand storm had flown overnight to Korea, inflicting serious damage there, too. Soon after that, I began planting trees in the deserts of North-East Asia, known as one of the world's four major dust bowls.

With my Chinese counterparts, in 2006 I launched a five-year "Great Green Wall" forestation project across the moving dunes of the Kubuqi desert, Inner Mongolia. After four years of a sometimes desperate fight, the project has recorded its first real successes and has been featured in a full-page colour report in China's Renmin Ribao, the People's Daily.

At the outset of our project, the local people affected by desertification were either doubtful or indifferent. Recently, however, they have started a voluntary programme of day-and-night care of trees planted in the desert. They have begun to dream of going back to their old houses, to villages where they were born and once lived but from which they were driven by the relentless advance of sand. I cannot turn my eyes away from the dream of those local people.

Based on this early success, our "Green Eco-Village" project was launched three years ago in the same desert but over a vastly widened area, restoring the old vanished villages along the Great Green Wall.

On June 17th this year, observing the World Day to Combat Desertification co-sponsored with UNCCD, I officially launched the "One Billion Trees in the Desert" global programme at the UN Pavilion at Shanghai EXPO 2010. I firmly commit myself to supporting the global effort to combat desertification, planting trees in deserts for my family and for the greater family of humans on Earth.

Let us join in action to support the UN Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification and save mankind from desertification, a scourge currently afflicting one-third of the Earth's land surface area and threatening 1.2 billion people in more than 100 countries.

.....

Ambassador Byong Hyon Kwon, a retired senior diplomat, is one of the world's foremost experts in the promotion and management of large-scale, labour-intensive projects to plant drought-resistant trees and shrubs that retain moisture and help fix soil in landscapes affected by severe dune encroachment.



Local people have begun to dream of going back to their old houses, to villages from which they were driven by the sand. I cannot turn my eyes from that dream.



The promise of the drylands

Goats graze near Umarizal, a small town in Rio Grande do Norte state, north-east Brazil, about 320 km south of Fortaleza. Green after the rains, these fields lie in the sertao, the drylands that spread across six Brazilian states and are home to about 15 million people. Sustainable land management here is vital to the maintenance of good soil and rural development.

Deserts and drylands take up 41% of the earth's land surface. 2.1 billion people live there, 90% of them in developing countries. The drylands support 50% of world's livestock, store 46% of global carbon and support 44% of all the world's agricultural cultivation. 30% of all cultivated plants originated in the drylands.

At the same time, drought, erosion, overgrazing and other man-made and natural causes are degrading 24% of this total surface area. 110 countries are at risk. Almost a quarter of degrading land is rangeland, and 20% is cropland. 1.5 billion people in the world depend on this degrading land for food, water and jobs. 12 million hectares of land, an area the size of Benin, are lost every year – a potential deficit of some 20 million tons of grain. Desertification and land degradation cost US\$42 billion in lost income every year.

Drylands can be saved, however. Degradation can be arrested and reversed. Between 1981 and 2006, deliberate human intervention improved 16% of all degraded land, almost half of it rangelands and one-fifth croplands.

Photo: Shayna Sara Harris, Fulbright Scholar Brazil

About the UNCCD

Developed as a result of the Rio Summit, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is a unique instrument that has brought attention to the land degradation affecting some of the most vulnerable people and ecosystems in the world. The UNCCD benefits from the largest membership of the three Rio Conventions and is increasingly recognized as an instrument that can make an important contribution to the achievement of sustainable development and poverty reduction. For more information: Awareness Raising, Communication and Education Unit, UNCCD

Tel (Switchboard): + 49 228 815 2800

Fax: + 49 228 815 2898

secretariat@unccd.int

www.unccd.int

Contact UNCCD News at newsbox@unccd.int

UNCCD News

UNCCD News is published by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). See all back issues at <http://newsbox.unccd.int>

Editor: Timothy Nater: tim@crosslake.biz

Design: Rebus, Paris: www.rebusparis.com

Copyright ©2010 UNCCD: secretariat@unccd.int