

Statement by Mr. Ahmed Djoghla
Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity
On the occasion of the
World Day to Combat Desertification 2009:
Conserving land and water = Securing our common future

This year's World Day to Combat Desertification, celebrated on 17 June under the theme "Conserving land and water = Securing our common future", is particularly relevant for the Convention on Biological Diversity. The pressures on the World's natural functions have reached such levels that ecosystems' ability to satisfy the needs of future generations is being seriously compromised. We are currently facing two major challenges which are interconnected : desertification and biodiversity loss. These challenges have further implications for sustainable development, and their impacts are compounded by climate change.

Desertification leads to biodiversity loss, including through habitat degradation, reduction of ecosystem productivity, and the expansion of invasive species. Such biodiversity loss also threatens ecosystem services that are vital for the livelihoods of millions of people, especially in Africa. Likewise, the loss of biodiversity undermines the health of dryland ecosystems and makes them more vulnerable to desertification. As such, addressing desertification and associated biodiversity loss is of critical importance if we are to secure our common future.

Dry and sub-humid lands represent a unique repository of biodiversity, culture and traditional knowledge. The dry areas of the world are the origin of a large number of globally important cereals and food legumes, such as barley, wheat, faba beans and lentils. However, these zones are prone to desertification, land degradation and drought, and the pressure is increasing on dryland ecosystems to provide services such as food, forage, fuel, building materials, and water for humans and livestock.

Food security is also threatened by desertification and biodiversity loss. Agricultural ecosystems that are rich in biodiversity provide a wide variety of foods. In addition, agriculture and agricultural biodiversity account for 20 to 60 per cent of national GDP in Africa with most of this production taking place in dry and sub-humid lands. However, almost half of African dry and sub-humid lands are vulnerable to desertification.

In addition to human activities contributing to desertification and biodiversity loss, changes in the climate are adding pressure on already vulnerable areas. Indeed, changing precipitation regimes, increased heat stress, and the increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events is contributing to desertification and the associated loss of biodiversity throughout the world's dry and sub-humid lands, such as Mediterranean, savannah, and grassland ecosystems.



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The Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change identified dryland ecosystems, including wetlands in drylands, as being particularly vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change.

The combined impacts of climate change, desertification, land degradation and biodiversity loss will have unprecedented and far-reaching implications for all segments of society, but it will be the poor that will suffer the most. The UNEP Global Environment Outlook highlighted that:

As human well-being declines, the options available to people that allow them to regulate their use of natural resources at sustainable levels declines as well. This in turn increases pressure on ecosystem services and can create a downward spiral of increasing poverty and further degradation of ecosystem services.

The issue of environmental degradation also brings new light to bear on the concepts of international peace and security. In accepting the Nobel Peace Prize, Prof. Wangari Maathai stated that:

There can be no peace without equitable development and there can be no development without sustainable management of the environment in a democratic and peaceful space.

Combating desertification and biodiversity loss call for alliances. The need for collaboration and partnerships is crucial to address these issues. In this regards, Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, at the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, recognized the need for enhanced synergies and encouraged further collaboration between the three Rio Conventions. The Conference of the Parties, under the decision on biodiversity of dry and sub-humid lands, also recognized the important role of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and welcomed its Ten-Year Strategic Plan and Framework to enhance the implementation of that Convention. The three Executive Secretaries recently took up this challenge at the ninth meeting of the Joint Liaison Group of the Rio Conventions at which time we addressed issues such as harmonized reporting and joint activities to create awareness and celebrate the International Year of Biodiversity in 2010.

We are pleased, therefore, to join you in the celebrations of the World Day to Combat Desertification 2009 under the theme “Conserving land and water = Securing our common future”. We look very much forward to working together to make the 2010 International Year of Biodiversity a success in advancing the mutually supportive objectives of the three Rio Conventions.

I wish you a very successful celebration.