

After Madrid COP. National and international elements for progress in combating desertification.

**Keynote speech by Dr. Eng. Leopoldo Rojo Serrano
Chief of Service of Desertification Control. Ministry of Environment. Spain
Geneve, 29 January 2008**

Mr. Chair, distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentleman, we are very pleased with the invitation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) to participate as speakers regarding land desertification and degradation, since Spain feels deeply committed to the fight against desertification. This could not be any different, since a third of our country is significantly affected by land degradation and an even greater percentage runs the risk of land quality loss. It all highlights the prominence we have granted consistently to a European Union Framework Directive for the Protection of Soil in Europe.

We are closely familiar with the desertification process and for many years have worked to combat and mitigate it, in accordance with the main goal established by our National Action Plan. This Plan also strives to achieve the sustainable growth of affected areas in our national territory, to determine factors leading to desertification and to establish practical measures to combat it.

But we also feel committed to the rest of countries who suffer desertification which is why we subsequently proposed the specific North Mediterranean annex, since this problem not only affects our planet's poorest countries: it affects all of us.

During the eighth session of the Conference of the Parties, which was hosted in Spain in September 2007, the Minister for the Environment and Conference President introduced the Madrid Declaration to the Party Countries, a summary of many of the directions we believe the international fight against desertification should embark. The following are some examples:

- The necessity of establishing concrete targets within the UNCCD process through the adoption and implementation of a 10-year strategy to combat desertification and drought, in order to provide, as soon as possible, an operational plan and, in particular, indicators to evaluate progress.
- The relevance of considering the social and economic costs of desertification, and especially the costs of inaction in areas affected by land degradation, in order to raise awareness and increase support for the affected areas. It is simple to agree on the fact that support against desertification needs to be increased efficiently and that, for now, information on economic and social costs due to land degradation is scarce, whereas should indicators of these costs be available, we would have the necessary economic evidence to persuade players and sponsors of the extent of this problem.
- The convenience of promoting of effective participation by NGOs and other civil society stakeholders in the UNCCD processes in correspondence with the relevant role the Civil Society has played within the combat against desertification.
- The importance of reinforcing the linkages through increased cooperation among the three Rio Conventions, optimizing the use of existing instruments
- The relevance of strengthening institutional and programmatic links facilitating access by UNCCD Parties to the human and financial resources that are required to catalyze and support their national efforts.
- The convenience of promoting scientific and technological links through joint work on vulnerability, degradation and carbon sinks.

Mr. President, as a result of our long experience in combating desertification and considering potential fields of common interest in the European scope, Spain could contribute with scientific and technical methodologies for restoration of degraded ecosystems in mountain areas; design and management of field networks for the monitoring of desertification and the mapping and assessment of soil quality and soil erosion. Mitigation of water scarcity and drought effects is another field in which we could share a long experience. Some details about this last issue will be provided by my colleagues during the discussion if you allow us.

Further to this, we think it is recommendable to consider the possibility of turning the Convention into a framework of scientific excellence and the worldwide benchmark regarding issues on desertification and land degradation, of which a third of the world's population is a potential victim.

As many of you already may know, the Convention of the United Nations in the fight against Desertification is right now at a turning point in which its bodies and institutions are being reformed, once the need to reinforce its efficacy has been acknowledged. Those of us who are part of it all know that we face a serious challenge but also, I am sure, that we are capable of achieving it, if faced in a competent and firm way.

Mr. President, Spain is not only an affected country, but also a donor which actively supports the efforts of developing countries in their fight against desertification through Programmes such as Azahar –focused on actions in Mediterranean countries. These actions include soil conservation, sustainable water management, renewable energy and efficient energy use, sustainable tourism, sustainable manufacturing, environmental sanitation, planning and management, all of which pretend to offer effective responses to the main environmental problems faced by Mediterranean countries and in which Spain holds great experience and a high level of knowledge.

As with regards to Latin America and the Caribbean, it is worth pointing out the support that the Araucaria XXI Programme is offering to the Convention by, for example, helping to create and launch the Programme Regional Agro-forestry and combat of poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Since 2001, Spanish economic support for development has amounted to 155 million euros in the field of Combat against Desertification.

Furthermore, aware that desertification and land degradation, or “the most important environmental challenge of our time” in the words of the UN University, can displace 50 million people in the next 10 years, Spain organised in October 2006 the II International Symposium on Desertification and Migrations in which representatives of 38 countries analysed the relationship between poverty, migration, sustainable development and desertification.

In this line, Spain will fund the study “Grounding security, securing the ground”, promoted by the Secretariat of the Convention to combat Desertification, foreseen to be presented in May within the framework of the Sixteenth Meeting of the Sustainable Development Commission. Two million euros will be transferred to FAO to fund reforestation projects in countries severely affected by desertification. The Global Mechanism has also seen its work enhanced by the Spanish contribution of 1.3 million euros in the last biennium.

Ladies and Gentlemen, ten years after it came into force, the Convention on the Fight against Desertification boasts universal participation and is increasingly considered to be an instrument that can contribute to the long-term achievement of sustainable development and the reduction of poverty worldwide. Vice-versa, the fact that the Commission on Sustainable Development includes the desertification problem as one of its main subjects is a clear indicator that the voice of the silent threat is beginning to be heard in other international forums. We are very happy about this because we see it as a firm step towards a solution. And Spain, as an affected country, donor and current

Presidency of the COP, will offer its complete support to achieve it. Thank you very much.