

**Joint Statement by the UNCCD –Secretariat and the Global Mechanism of the UNCCD**

**On the Occasion of Economic Commission of Europe Third Regional Implementation Meeting on Sustainable Development**

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**Delivered by**

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Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for allowing me to make this intervention on behalf of Mr Luc Gnacadja, Executive Secretary for the the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) secretariat and of Mr Christian Mersmann, Managing Director of the Global Mechanism of the UNCCD.

The UNCCD, which was designed to combat desertification, drought and land degradation through the lens of sustainable development, today has almost universal membership (192 country parties globally and all ECE member states apart from one). As a consequence its aims and goals will mean very different things depending on where you are located geographically and your economic and social situation. The economic, social and environmental consequences of land degradation, desertification and drought remain as serious today as when Chapter 12 of Agenda 21 was adopted in Rio in 1992.

For some member states present here today, desertification and drought do present a daily threat, for others, it is land degradation in the form of loss of soil fertility and productivity, erosion and contamination. The human induced dimensions of this are extremely complex and have consequences far from the local problem. While the UNCCD has advocated a higher place for these issues on national and international political agendas, they have yet to grab the attention of decision makers to the degree necessary for concerted action. Therefore countries in two UNCCD regional annexes, present here today, the Northern Mediterranean and the one for Central and Eastern Europe are currently intensifying the use of the Convention as a tool for in-country coordination for integrated land management. In addition Central Asia, within the context of the regional annex for Asia, is increasing its sub-regional cooperation on both technical as well as financial aspects.

Today, the UNCCD and the concerns related to sustainable land management operate in a very different environment than it faced in Rio. International agreed development goals, outcomes of various summits and conferences, the developments in other MEAs, such climate change, prospects of agricultural trade liberalization, and the realization that degradation of natural resources can lead to growing numbers of environmental refugees and migrants – all shed a new light on the linkages between poverty and environmental degradation and the importance and potential use of the Convention.

The financing environment has also changed profoundly in the last decade, with the Global Environment Facility (GEF) becoming a financial mechanism of the Convention as well as donors having refocused their financing strategies to support country-driven priorities, based on Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and other country-led development planning instruments as well as on increased coordination among bilateral and multilateral organizations at country level. This has led to the need for changing

approached to access international public assistance. Lastly, innovative financing instruments have emerged, including payments for eco-system services and carbon finance and a greater engagement by the private sector. The Global Mechanism of the UNCCD, as a result, has adjusted its support to governments to the realities of this new financial environment.

Concerns related to climate change are today a formidable locomotive for international cooperation. Land degradation will be one of the first phenomena many countries will experience as a result of climate change. One of the measures for mitigation and adaptation to the effects of climate change is addressing land degradation and the international community already has one tool at its disposal designed to do just this, namely the UNCCD.

Several important technical issues and concerns still have to be addressed. The document before you emphasizes, among others, the use of improved soil management techniques as crucial for protecting land from erosion and other degradation. It also promotes using soil organic matter in order to retain soil moisture, thus protecting valuable water resources. Judging from the discussion on agriculture yesterday and the discussion on land management today one could look at a fertile top soil as a Global Public Good.

More efforts are still required to understand and assess the interactions between biophysical, social and economic factors, in particular as they relate to the inter-linkages with climate change. Deeper knowledge on the cost of inaction as well as forgone income because of land degradation needs to be developed and disseminated.

Effective prevention of desertification requires both local management and macro policies in order to mainstream the role and the sustainability of ecosystem services in decision making processes. This session also needs to address how to communicate messages in a language accessible to decision makers. Here the interface between science, data analysis and policy plays an important role.

Ten years after the entry into force of the Convention, the international community has renewed its commitment towards the achievement of the ambitious goal of combating desertification and land degradation. It has done so through the adoption, at the last Conference of Parties (COP) in Madrid in 2007, of a **10-year strategy** to enhance UNCCD implementation at all levels. This strategy will seize opportunities to create a revitalized common ground for all UNCCD stakeholders. The stated vision of the UNCCD ten year strategy is that *"The aim for the future is to forge a global partnership to reverse and prevent desertification/land degradation and to mitigate the effects of drought in affected areas in order to support poverty reduction and environmental sustainability"*.

The Strategy calls for immediate action by all actors concerned, for which it sets out clear and achievable objectives, priorities and responsibilities. This includes affected developed and developing countries, development cooperation partners, multilateral organizations, the scientific community, civil society and the private sector as well as the institutions of the Convention.

The UNCCD was designed as an environment and development Convention from the very start, this has been both its bane and beauty ever since. The beauty of the integrated and holistic sustainable development concept often meets the bane of the challenges when faced with the reality of sectoral approaches to implementation. The strategy therefore provides an excellent framework for a global partnership of the international community for further policy development and implementation in addressing concerns related to land degradation.

Thank You,