

World Meteorological Organization
Mr. Robert Stefansky

Thank you chairman. I would like to share with the delegates some of the views and activities of the World Meteorological Organization on the issues of climate change and climate variability in relation to agriculture and drought. These comments would focus on question 1 and on the last section on lessons learned and obstacles on drought risk management.

As you know the IPCC, which has been co-sponsored by the WMO and United Nations Environment Programme since its creation in 1988, recently co-shared the Nobel Peace Prize. This has brought much needed attention to the issue of climate change and highlighted the work of climate scientists and institutions around the world and of course in the European community. The IPCC reports emphasizes the current observed and future climate changes and highlights the issue of impacts on agriculture and drought. This has already been mentioned by the gentleman from Italy and several other delegates.

There is much more work to be done on issues of climate change and climate variability and drought. By developing better tools and policies to deal with current climate variability countries and regions will be in better position to deal with future climate change. As mentioned by the delegate from Slovenia, there is a connection between drought, land degradation, and desertification. There are many challenges of drought monitoring and early warning. A drought early warning system is designed to identify climate and water supply trends and thus to detect the emergence or probability of occurrence and the likely severity of drought. This information can reduce impacts if delivered to decision makers in a timely and appropriate format and if mitigation measures and preparedness plans are in place. Understanding the underlying causes of vulnerability is also an essential component of drought management because the ultimate goal is to reduce risk for a particular location and for a specific group of people or economic sector.

Monitoring drought presents some unique challenges because of its distinctive characteristics. These challenges include:

- Data sharing is inadequate between government agencies and research institutions, and the high cost of data, limits their application in drought monitoring, preparedness, mitigation and response.
- Drought monitoring systems should be integrated, coupling multiple climate, water and soil parameters and socio-economic indicators to fully characterize drought magnitude, spatial extent and potential impact.
- Impact assessment methodologies, a critical part of drought monitoring and early warning systems, are not standardized or widely available, hindering impact estimates and the creation of regionally appropriate mitigation and response management.

This is why WMO along with the UNCCD have worked to establish the Drought Management Centre for Southeastern Europe in Slovenia. There is more information on this in paragraph 41 of document ECE/AC.25/2008/3. And we also have been working on setting up a similar centre in Central Asia with UNCCD as our colleague from Uzbekistan has mentioned. We hope that the European community will support both of these centers to do its work. I would like to add, based on the recent comments, that WMO is working on a Sand and Dust Storm Warning System. We held a meeting in Barcelona in Nov 2007 on this subject. Thank you.