

Statement by H.E. Mr. **Kelebone A. Maope**,
Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Lesotho to the UN

At the **World Soil Day 2016**

Conference Room 12 UN Headquarters, New York
2 December 2016, 9:30-12:00 hours

The Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Lesotho to the United Nations is honored to participate, together with the Permanent Missions of the Kingdom of Thailand and that of Turkey to the United Nations, with the collaboration of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), in this event to mark World Soil Day and the year 2016 as International Year of Pulses.

My Mission wishes to add our voice in the payment of homage to the late King Bhumibol Adulyadei of the Kingdom of Thailand for having dedicated his long reign to the course of environmental conservation, and to the articulation of principles of environmental sustainability through the choice of moderation over greed in the economic exploitation of natural resources.

This event is being co-organized under the auspices and support of the FAO and the UNCCD. My Mission wishes, therefore, to extend our words of appreciation to the FAO, not only for their role in to-day's event, but for their reliable partnership in the development of my country, and their commendable efforts in combating the serious problem of land degradation in that country during the last 50 years since 1966 when Lesotho joined the organization.

One thematic element of to-day's topic is the halting of soil degradation. It will be recalled that it was the UNCCD which first introduced the global consciousness to the urgent need to halt the depletion of soils through the concept of 'land degradation neutrality' in 2012 during the Rio+20 Conference. The outcome document of that Conference, namely, 'The Future We Want', recognized the need for urgent action to reverse land degradation. Through sterling efforts of the UNCCD, the concept of land degradation neutrality has since been included as a part of Goal 15 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted in September 2015. It is most appropriate, therefore, that the UNCCD is and should be a co-facilitator at today's event.

It is universally agreed that land resources, such as soil and water, are the base for economic growth and social prosperity. In the context of climate change, the role and potential of soils to provide storage for carbon is recognized in order to reduce global warming. It is, however, also universally agreed that huge areas of usable land are lost to land degradation globally.

Agricultural activity, while essential for human livelihood, is one of the main drivers of land degradation.

It is in this context of land degradation that my Mission is participating in this event. Land degradation is a huge problem in Lesotho at the present time. A network of gullies in the lowlands of Lesotho presents an ugly and depressing picture of the country. Land degradation in Lesotho is driven largely by mismanagement of the economy which involves animal husbandry (overgrazing) and agricultural tillage methods entailing too much disturbance of the soil. A solution must include finding alternative means of livelihood for inhabitants, so as to move people away from eroded land which must be let to recover. (At this event, through the gallery of a few images, we will illustrate the problem of land degradation in Lesotho, as well as measures which are being taken to address the challenge.)

A recent and comprehensive work which seeks to describe the nature and causes of the land degradation problem is a book by Kate B. Showers, *Imperial Gullies: Soil Erosion and Conservation in Lesotho* (2005).

In attending this event, my Mission seeks confirmation or no-confirmation by eminent scientists who will make presentations to-day of certain thoughts as follows: First, the science of climate change teaches us, as alluded to earlier, that well maintained land, free from gullies, rapidly accumulates carbon from the atmosphere. In this way an opportunity is created for non-polluting countries, such as Lesotho, to make a valuable contribution to reduction of global warming by engaging in extensive land restoration projects whose effect will be the capture of carbon from the atmosphere into the ground.

Second, climate change science teaches further that well maintained land captures nitrogen and other nutrients into the soil for the benefit of high agricultural yield. This brings into relevance the theme of this event, namely, 'Soils and pulses: A symbiosis for life and for halting soil degradation.' The involvement of pulses in the implementation of land restoration activities and agricultural practices holds great promise for sustainable economic prosperity and environmental protection for future generations.

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