



United Nations Convention  
to Combat Desertification



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**Talking Points**

**World Soil Day**

**New York, 2 December 2016**

**Excellencies, Madame Moderator, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

*The UNCCD was ratified by the Government of Thailand in 2000 under the leadership of His Majesty the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej thus implementing, at the world stage, his lifelong work on soils and sustainable soil management.*

*I have also to salute in this room the delegation of Turkey, a country which presides over COP.12. Its leadership is very much appreciated as the country invests a lot in the implementation of the Convention in particular in the funding of LDN target setting project.*

1. I am honoured to make a few remarks on the occasion of the World Soil Day. Soils are the foundation of agriculture, of the pulses that provide protein for the poorest and most vulnerable. Land – its soil, water and biodiversity - is the life infrastructure and foundation for our societies. It allows our economies to grow and prosper. The land and its soil alone provide more than 50% of the total value of all the ecosystem services we enjoy. It is therefore no coincidence that the geography of land degradation and desertification coincides with that of abject poverty, chronic malnutrition and hunger as also, today, political instability and conflict.

2. Every year, we degrade 12 million hectares of productive land – an area of the size of Benin or Honduras. Today, more than half our farmland is degraded. In order to meet future needs for food, freshwater, biofuels and urban growth we will have to convert an area the size of Norway into new farmland every year. This would cause deforestation and other negative environmental impact. In this respect, the move towards land degradation neutrality would avoid land degradation through managing sustainably the farmland we already have, but also through land rehabilitation and reclamation of the land we already degraded and abandoned.



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Today it amounts to 500 million hectares that could be restored cost-effectively, rather than being abandoned.

3. Climate change is further exacerbating this situation, with many regions becoming drier, suffering more frequent and prolonged droughts, rendering soil barren and unproductive. Climate induced water stress and land degradation could lead to loss of 2/3s of all arable land during the next decades, thus plunging millions of small holder farmers into poverty and contributing to forced migration and conflict.

4. Yet, for long, land degradation has been a blind spot for the international community, dismissed as a regional or local issue. The outcome of Rio plus 20 was a milestone. In the “Future We Want”, world leaders addressed this blind spot and acknowledged that Desertification, land degradation and drought were challenges of a global dimension that posed serious challenges for the sustainable development of all countries, in particular developing countries. The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda went a step further when it enshrined the commitment to sustainable development target 15.3 which envisages land degradation neutrality by 2030.

5. Going land degradation neutral will unleash the formidable capacity of land and its soils to address several global policy challenges that the world is facing today, especially food insecurity, poverty eradication, climate change adaptation, mitigation and resilience. Land degradation neutrality is a crucial SDG accelerator which is essential if we are to feed over 9 billion people we expect by 2050. We will not combat poverty, we will not protect biodiversity, we will not adapt to climate change, we will not stop deforestation, to name but a few global challenges we are facing if we do not tackle land degradation. If we have to leave no one behind, peoples living in areas where land is degraded must receive priority as they are the ones left behind by all accounts.

6. We look forward to working closely with partners, including through events such as the World Soil Day to generate awareness on the crucial need to nurture land and its soils. We firmly believe that the fate of land goes hand in hand with a sustainable future.

7. On World Soil Day, let us pledge to do more to protect land and its soil, a crucial sustainable development asset, yet overlooked.

8. Happy World Soil Day.