
INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON DROUGHT AND AGRICULTURE

PREDICT, PLAN, PREPARE: STOP DROUGHT BECOMING A FAMINE

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(VIA VIDEO MESSAGE)

I thank the Islamic Republic of Iran, The Kingdom of the Netherlands, and the FAO for hosting this timely meeting on a subject addressed by the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues in 1988 when we presented, at that time, the encroaching desert, or the consequences of human failure.

Like Al Gore, I believe in global warming and would add the significance of human warming. And in that regard I would like to say very clearly that the increased desertification to force large populations to flee their homes is a subject of the nexus of peace, drought, and good management of natural resources.

I would like to suggest that risk assessment before this crisis developed is essential, and not only in the context of security in the traditional sense of working against terrorism, or working against weapons of mass destruction both of which are causes of our probable decline as a human race. But also in the context of the timely insistence that we are making populations prey to extremism if we do not recognise that the global decisions that we take are not implemented at the regional level in a coordinated manner.

I would like to suggest that the MENA region, which is 400 million people. is one of the most drought affect regions of the globe and desertification will force as it is doing, thousands possibly hundreds of thousands from their homes.

I think that the prediction of this movement was made very clear during the 1994 Casablanca summit meeting when we suggested that the stabilisation of 24 countries ranging from Morocco to Turkey over ten years by providing clean drinking water and investment in the vulnerable and the marginalised was they only way to combat the desertification of our minds. we seem to only focus on urban centres and not on the importance of reaching out to people and indeed to dryland ecosystems which cover over one third of the worlds land area.

These areas which are vulnerable to overexploitation and vulnerable to the developments of science and technology, if I can put it another way, because clearly strategic concepts of science and technology for development are arresting the desertification process and in so doing recovering areas already desertified. But of course, there are aspects of the science and technology issue relating to the desertification that have to be mentioned and one is the Penetration of technologies mainly to increase the productivity of cash crop areas and their impact on natural systems.

Which is why I want to move with you from the binary pathology with dealing with individual countries in say The Levant region to a regional concept of stabilising The Levant and in so doing stabilising the consequences of the Syria crisis which after all started with desertification.

With Denis Meadows, I remember in 2004 with the Club of Rome revising the Limits to Growth, the 30-year update of that insightful study and with Manfred Max-Neef talking about barefoot economics. I want to say

very clearly that the relative backwardness of science and technology for management of arid and semi-arid lands is the result of the absence of affinity between people and governments and people and entrepreneurship.

The first technological issue is the result of the modernisation of croplands in order to achieve a level of productivity for integration into international markets.

I would like to ask you ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, how can we speak of poverty, political instability, deforestation, overgrazing and bad irrigation, which all contribute to desertification and undermine the productivity of the land, when nearly 250 million are directly affected by encroachment on to liveable land?

I would like to suggest that chorography which falls, as you know, between topography and geography is one way of speaking about zoning and regional management.

I would like to think that the Anthropocene Epoch, in which we are living at the moment, with man triumphant so to speak, in destroying our natural habitat is a period of desertification and encroachment upon liveable land which affects the poorest and those most likely to fall in to the arms of this extremism which we claim to fear and are hot-housing so to speak as we address the subject.

In the last 15 years, from 2000-2015 the number of international migrants has risen from 173 million to over 244 million. Drought is known to cause more death, destruction and displacement than any other known natural disaster. By 2025, a mere 8 years away, 1.8 billion will experience absolute water scarcity and two thirds of the world will be in water stressed conditions. Demand for water is set to increase by 50% by 2050. And the critical mass for the management of resources human, natural and economic has not yet been achieved.

We have no regional bank for reconstruction and development in this MENA region, Zakat, which will be known to our Muslim audience, and beyond, is one way of addressing the subject of migration with an indicative planning figure to enable the poor, and I talk about enabling and empowering the poor rather than assistance and succour and relief because after all the per capita availability of freshwater in the West Asia North Africa region is ten times less than the global average. The growing season in the middle east is now shorter by 18 days. The regions minimum freshwater resources are expected to fall by a further 50% by 2010 and, last but not least, 99% of the total land in the MENA, or the West Asia North Africa WANA region as I prefer to call it, lies within semi-arid and arid and dry sub-humid areas.

I thank the data from the FAO for providing these realities. And I would like to suggest that if our region is going to be exposed, or 45% of it, to salinity, soil, nutrient depletion, and wind-water erosion, we will have set back the process of early-warning that we started in the eighties by recognising that a third of this region is basically facing backwardness, generally of science and technology and governments and governance.

So once again how to we raise the alarm? I would like to thank FAO for suggesting the activity book in the context of the November World Food Day. And in that regard I would like to suggest that the social dimension of desertification is a complex one but we have to be adaptive to particular conditions behaviours, values and institutional arrangements.

We have to make the change we deserve.

Thank you very much.