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Statement by

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on the occasion of the

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United Nations General Assembly
Second Committee

Agenda item 20(e)

*ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:
Implementation of the United Nations Convention to
Combat Desertification in those countries experiencing
serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in
Africa*

New York, 8 November 2012

**Mr. Chairman,
Bureau Members,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Greetings from Bonn.

Allow me first to congratulate you, and your colleagues, as members of the Second Committee Bureau for your election and your dynamism as you steer our work.

Today, I have the honour to speak before you, following the Rio Plus 20 Conference, at a time when the international community is framing its policy response to the challenge of global sustainability. This exercise could not be more opportune as there is a pressing need for action. You may want to think about this: by 2030, the demand for food is expected to grow by 50 percent and that for energy and water by 45 and 30 percent respectively. Each of these demands will claim more land, leading to more deforestation and environmental degradation, unless we commit to restoring degraded land to a healthy and productive state. Without such commitment and action, we may face a situation already predicted by J. Clay who, in Nature magazine, considered that “by 2050, we may need three Earths to meet the demands of our [food] consumption”.

Allow me now to introduce the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/67/295 and entitled Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 66/201. The present report constitutes an update to the General Assembly on the main activities that have been undertaken with respect to the process of implementing the Convention.

The key section of this report is the consideration of desertification, land degradation and drought by the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. Therefore, allow me to devote some additional attention to the outcome of Rio Plus 20 as it strongly relates to the core issues of the UNCCD.

It is my earnest assessment that, following the High-level meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on addressing desertification, land degradation and drought in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, the Rio Plus20 Conference constituted an historic milestone, raising the profile of the UNCCD and its core mandate to a higher political level.

Contained in five short paragraphs (205-209) of the outcome document, “The Future We Want”, Heads of State and Government and high-level representatives attending the Conference recognized the economic and social significance of good land management, including soil, and particularly its contribution to economic growth, biodiversity, sustainable agriculture and food security, eradicating poverty, women’s empowerment, addressing climate change and improving water availability.

Stressing the global dimension of DLDD challenges, they recognized the need for urgent action to reverse land degradation. In view of this, world leaders undertook to strive to achieve a land-degradation neutral world in the context of sustainable development. Further, they reaffirmed their resolve under the UNCCD to take coordinated action nationally, regionally and internationally to monitor land degradation globally and undertook to restore degraded lands in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas.

The Conference resolved to support and to strengthen the implementation of the UNCCD and its ten-year Strategy, including through mobilizing adequate, predictable and timely financial resources. It noted the importance of mitigating the effects of DLDD in order to contribute to sustainable development and poverty eradication, including by preserving and developing oases,

restoring degraded lands, improving soil quality and improving water management. In this regard, the Conference encouraged and recognized the importance of partnerships and initiatives for the safeguarding of land resources.

With regard to the science and policy interface, the Conference took note of the decision of UNCCD COP10 to establish an ad hoc working group, taking into account regional balance, to discuss specific options for the provision of scientific advice to its Parties. This matter will be further discussed on the occasion of the second UNCCD Scientific Conference, on the theme “Economic assessment of desertification, sustainable land management and resilience of arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas”, to be held from 4 to 7 February 2013 in Fortaleza, Brazil.

The report of the Secretary-General also refers to a number of activities undertaken on the margins of Rio Plus 20. For instance, the Executive Secretaries of the three Rio Conventions, along with the current Presidents of the respective Conferences of the Parties, held a roundtable to discuss ways and means of generating synergies in national implementation and in support of sustainable development. For its part, the Government of Brazil hosted a special commemorative event to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the three Rio Conventions.

The global observance of the 2012 World Day to Combat Desertification was also celebrated in Rio. It was in the context of that observance that the three winners of the Land for Life award were announced.

The report also mentions the forthcoming High-level Meeting on National Drought Policies to be held in Geneva in March 2013. It is envisaged that the meeting, co-organized by UNCCD secretariat, WMO and in collaboration with a number of United Nations Agencies will provide practical insight into useful science-based actions for drought preparedness and risk management.

Mr. Chairman,

In Rio de Janeiro, world leaders agreed to policy developments on DLDD issues that are unprecedented. To be made operational, concerted action nationally, regionally and internationally, is now needed. By agreeing to strive to achieve a land-degradation neutral world, in the context of sustainable development, we should both monitor land degradation globally and restore the health and productivity of degraded lands in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas for the well-being of present and future generations.

In this respect, the General Assembly may wish to endorse these commitments on desertification, land degradation and drought and to invite member States and the United Nations system to implement them as a matter of priority, with a view to accelerating the pace and scale of sustainable development.

Thank you for your kind attention.