

**Intergovernmental Preparatory Meeting**  
**for the Seventeenth Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development**  
**23 – 27 February 2009**

**Drought**

**Statement**  
**on behalf of the European Union**  
**by**

**Prof. Bedřich Moldan**  
**Senator of the Parliament of the Czech Republic**  
**Director of the Environment Center of the Charles University in Prague**  
**Head of Delegation**

**New York, February 25, 2009**



Madam Chairperson / Mr Chairman, distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Czech Republic has the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its twenty-seven Member States.

**Drought** is a natural phenomenon, which, these days, affects almost all places around the world without respect to climatic zones. In the future, due to human activities and climatic and hydrological variability, the **area affected by drought is likely to increase**, provoking more land degradation, desertification, wild fires, and water stress with a negative impact on poverty, food availability, global security and migration.

Drought, as well as desertification, can have **important impacts on the achievement of sustainable development and far-reaching social and economic implications**. It also can affect the efforts towards the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, specifically the Millennium Development Goals.

Thus, in order to be able to feed a growing world population which should reach 9 billion by 2050, it is **essential to reverse land degradation processes, to continue to develop sustainable land management practices and to promote integrated water resource management, which includes water scarcity prevention and drought mitigation measures**. These combined measures are also crucial for the adaptation to the adverse effects of climate change.

Regarding **sustainable water resource management**, it is important to support the development and implementation of **Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM)** principles and plans at all levels, with particular emphasis on promoting water demand management and risk management policies for droughts and floods. IWRM at the basin level, including the transboundary level, is a means to safeguard water for food security in the long term: by addressing water-use conflicts and helping to secure and to enhance food production, by sustaining water availability, and by allocating available water resources efficiently, including for agricultural use. **Water efficiency and conservation measures**—such as new agricultural practices, improved infrastructure, non-conventional water resources and technologies including desalination and water harvesting—should be developed in different sectors.

To invest in the improvement or renewal of existing **infrastructure and technology**—notably, clean technologies that facilitate the efficient use of water—is an important step in addressing the challenge of water scarcity and drought.

The implementation of IWRM principles and climate change adaptation measures in national development strategies and policies in key water sectors, such as agriculture, energy, trade, and tourism, is especially important to build resilience. **Planning, preparedness and prevention measures, as opposed to crisis management, are crucial**.

Special attention must be paid to the sustainable use and protection of deep **groundwater resources**, which provide strategic reserves for periods of extreme water scarcity, but which are at risk of overexploitation and pollution. Also, the issues of water quality in many parts of the world, as well as treatment of water resources, including recycling, drainage and desalinization, deserve better attention.

In addition, research should also be targeted towards the development of monitoring systems for **soil carbon stocks**. Improved knowledge and data collection are necessary in order to evaluate the potential of soil carbon management in mitigating drought impacts, land

degradation, climate change and biodiversity loss. In this regard, the role that forests and (re)forestation policies play in fighting climate change, drought and desertification must be emphasized. We note, in this context, the progress that could be achieved on the basis of an approval of a non-legally binding instrument in the framework of the UNFF.

In order to promote better preparedness for drought impacts, **knowledge and data collection** should be improved and national and **international benchmarks and indicators for monitoring** scientific, environmental and socio-economic aspects of drought should be developed in order to be measurable and comparable in time and space.

**Drought management plans, early-warning and risk prevention** systems at the national and regional levels need to be based on such reliable information. But most of all, we need to assure that such plans can be translated into action at the local level. The integration of risk and drought management as a part of communal planning, appropriate capacity-building and the dissemination of relevant and reliable information to stakeholders at national and local levels are mandatory. All these activities should also be supported by **capable institutions**, such as existing or new **drought observatories**.

Dryland people have a vast traditional knowledge on dealing with climate variability. Since the early 1980's, we have acquired vast experience in the approaches and technologies of coping with climatic variability. All these experiences need to be valorized. In this regard, the promotion of local and regional approaches to drought **combining traditional knowledge with modern technologies** should be enhanced. At the same time, the **access, transfer, and adaptation of appropriate technologies** and measures must be encouraged, especially in developing countries.

Drought takes place regardless of state boundaries. International cooperation is therefore essential, especially in the context of **transboundary waters**, which was also recognized as the main theme of World Water Day 2009. Promoting new or reinforcing existing instruments is essential.

A number of international instruments on water already exist. In addition, the EU would like to emphasise the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (**UNCCD**) – currently the only legally binding universal agreement that addresses drought and desertification – as a **powerful tool to provide a framework to foster protection, sustainable use and management of water resources**.

Finally, the EU believes that the CSD should encourage countries to critically **assess, review and amend national action programmes** to tackle desertification, land degradation as well as drought issues in the new **perspective of the 10-Year Strategy of the UNCCD** and insist on integrating those action programmes into national development and investment strategic documents. In order to do so, strong **political commitment** and action are needed.

Thank you.