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Extended Remarks Upon
Which Intervention Is Based

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The United States is strongly committed to combating desertification, both at home and abroad. The success of on-the-ground, community-based solutions in combating desertification has been demonstrated time and time again. Lessons learned and best practices in this regard illustrate the success of utilizing bottom-up approaches, including those emphasized throughout the work programs of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification and its 10-Year Strategic Plan.

Building on one of the first recommendations of the Agenda 21 “Desertification and Drought” section (strengthening “the knowledge base and developing information and monitoring systems for regions prone to desertification and drought”), we encourage the development of local, regional and national land use plans that integrate scientific and local knowledge. These plans should be based on the land’s long-term potential to support ecosystem services (reflected in soil maps), and on the current status of the land relative to its long-term potential (soil quality and rangeland health). Completion of the recently initiated Global Soil Map should be followed by activities that make soils information accessible at the local level, and that allow individual farmers, herders and ranchers to contribute their own knowledge of the lands potential for recovery.

Within the United States, desertification has historically been a problem and remains a concern across a large portion of our western states. Severe drought and the resulting desertification, what became known as the “Dust Bowl” of the 1930s, resulted in a further shift within the United States to a focus on bottom-up solutions. For example, the work of the Civilian Conservation Corps on reversing soil erosion and reducing over-grazing helped restore the viability of the land. Today, combating desertification remains an issue on rangelands and lower elevation forests and woodlands due to unsustainable practices such as overgrazing, particularly during drought conditions. Overall, however, improved management and restoration has decreased the amount of degraded land in

these areas. The success of these efforts has been supported by careful land use planning. For instance, soil maps are used to determine the long-term restoration potential of the land to support, while assessments of soil quality and rangeland health are used to determine the short-term potential for recovery of desertified land.

Box 1. Land use planning, assessment and monitoring in desertified regions using the ecological site system

Rangelands represent the majority of desertified lands in the world. Efforts to restore these lands are often limited by a lack of understanding of the recovery potential. In the United States, the “Ecological Site” system uses soil maps to classify rangelands based on their long-term potential. Rangeland health assessments, which include both vegetation and soil quality indicators, are used to determine whether or not desertification has occurred. These assessments are also used to identify the limitations to recovery. This assessment system is now being independently applied in other countries, including Mexico, Syria, and Mongolia.

Another issue with respect to combating desertification, particularly in drought-prone areas, is that of sustaining adequate water supplies, particularly in the arid West, for competing uses, such as human consumption, agricultural, recreational, wildlife and other uses. Additionally, increased population pressure in the region has sometimes resulted in management conflict over water use. The U.S. Department of the Interior launched Water 2025 as a problem-solving initiative to help manage scarce water resources and develop partnerships to nourish a healthy environment and sustain a vibrant economy. Water 2025 encourages voluntary water banks and other market-based measures, improving technology for water conservation and efficiency, and removing institutional barriers to increase cooperation and collaboration among federal, state, tribal, and private organizations. The magnitude of this water challenge is described in the 2005 report entitled, “Water 2025 - Preventing Crisis and Conflict in the West” (<http://www.usbr.gov/water2025/images/Water2025-08-05.pdf>).

Box 2. The *Water 2025* Report

This report addresses the reality that the economic, social, and environmental health of the Western U.S. is important to the American people. *Water 2025* is also based on the recognition that the demands for water in many basins of the West exceed the available supply even in normal years. *Water 2025* is based on the following principles that must be recognized if we are to minimize or avoid water supply related crises:

1. Recognize and respect state, tribal, and federal water rights, contracts, and interstate compacts or decrees of the United States Supreme Court that allocate the right to use water;
2. Maintain and modernize existing water facilities so they will continue to provide water and power;
3. Enhance water conservation, use efficiency, and resource monitoring to allow existing water supplies to be used more effectively;
4. Use collaborative approaches and market based transfers to minimize conflicts;
5. Improve water treatment technology, such as desalination, to help increase water supply; and,
6. Existing water supply infrastructure can provide additional benefits for existing and emerging needs for water.

The experience the United States gained during the Dust Bowl era together with our observations of the great Sahel droughts of the 1970s, led us to realign our foreign assistance programs related to desertification. We now focus on community-based natural resource management (NRM) to improve land productivity and provide economic opportunities for communities facing desertification and reoccurring drought. U.S. foreign assistance efforts on sustainable land management policies have included:

- Supporting policy and institutional reforms that transfer resource rights and management authority from government to rural communities;
- Offering organizational and enterprise management training to help communities manage resources according to democratic and market-based principles; and,
- Supporting action-oriented research that resulted in natural forest regeneration and soil and water conservation.

Documented sites where desertification has been reduced are in the Sahel and southern Africa.

Over the last twenty years, African farmers have transformed large areas of the Sahel by investing in an array of NRM practices, including on-farm and community forestry, soil and water conservation, and more intensive management of natural products. As farmers

toiled to pull themselves and their families out of poverty and up the economic ladder, their efforts created landscapes with greater ground cover and greater plant diversity. USAID-supported initiatives led the way in breaking the rigid, top-down paradigm and in demonstrating the transformational potential of a rural population empowered by greater rights.

Southern Africa's progress has been achieved through the extension of community-based wildlife-management enterprises (also known as Community-based Natural Resources Management—CBNRM) while desertification reduction in the Sahel has been produced through the extension of a variety of community and farmer-based land management (FMNR) technologies. In both cases, the scale has achieved national proportions.

Box 3. Examples of successful community-based natural resource management:

- In Namibia, through support of USAID and partners, communities are registering conservancies that serve as localized NRM institutions. The establishment of conservancies has increased local responsibility and ownership over wildlife and other natural resources with one in nine Namibians involved in a conservancy. As a measure of desertification reduction, habitats have improved and are able to support large mammal populations that have increased dramatically. This increased land productivity has resulted in increased income derived from the land in the form of increased wildlife tourism and sustainable sport hunting. The annual revenues have grown considerably, with over US\$ 3.7 million in generated income in 2007.
- In Niger, Farmer-managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) has been estimated to cover 5.0 million hectares. FMNR is an agrosylvipastoral system in which farmers manage naturally-regenerated trees in crop fields for multiple uses. In addition to enriching and protecting the soil, this system diversifies the household economy by producing fuelwood, poles, high-quality browse, fruit, pharmacopoeia, and condiments. This and other NRM systems have essentially created *natural capital* in one of the poorest regions of the world.

While different in approaches, the extension and success of CBNRM and FMNR share common traits. Both were based on paradigms that differed significantly from those that guided rural development programs up through the 1980's and beyond. They also both profited from the learning process.

Experiments in the 1980's and 90's showed that where rural populations were given authority and responsibility over local resources, not only were livelihoods frequently improved, but land and habitat degradation often was substantially reduced. Where people had rights over resource use and access, they often developed and carried out plans that protected and, in some cases, improved the resource's productive capacity –

demonstrating that community-based, bottom-up approaches to natural resource management do work.

There are some common factors that were important to achieving success in reducing desertification:

- The role of the government shifted to a partnership with rural populations (a corollary of this was that the national technical cadre, through training, became more professional).
- Rural populations became active stakeholders in key value chains instead of being passive producers of raw products.
 - Traditional merchants and operators within value chains sometimes formed joint ventures with producer groups.
 - In order to be effective business partners, producer groups became legally-recognized, democratic associations managed by business principles.
- The national government made NRM an integral part of national strategies, policies and action plans, versus considering NRM as separate from national priorities such as poverty reduction, economic growth, climate change, etc.
- National land-use policies that conveyed authority and responsibility over land management to local populations were developed, with the stipulation that authority could be withdrawn should the responsibility for good management be ignored.
- Development programs focused on NRM activities as vehicles for building capacities of rural populations to manage enterprises and to make and implement decisions about land-use and access.
- Women, youth and members of other previously-disenfranchised groups became full members of NRM-based initiatives. Through superior performance, members of these groups demonstrated the communal benefits of tapping 100% of a community's human resource pool.

Box 4. Further examples of Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) include:

- Since 2007, USG and northern Kenyan development partners have put 400,000 hectares of land under improved management and expanded ecological connectivity with four protected areas. Support was centered on 12 community conservancies selected for their diversity of habitats, range of wildlife species, tourism potential and community commitment to rangeland conservation and livestock development options.
- In Malawi, community capacity building activities emphasize increased participatory community involvement in natural resources management and empowerment of people and communities in order to place stewardship for better management and protection of natural resources in the hands of the people.

Both within our borders and through our international assistance, the United States supports democratic decision making. Within the mandate of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the United States fully supports the bottom-up, local approach to address issues of land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub humid ecosystems. The often marginalized populations that live on these lands need to be empowered to have a voice in how these lands are used and supported with the tools to help them achieve their goals.

Rehabilitating land is not an easy or short term fix and modern technologies should be applied in coordination with local knowledge and practices. There is currently an opportunity to move forward in this regard as we focus on the implementation of the UNCCD's Ten-Year Strategic Plan. With a new focus on action, information from indicators and from an understanding of conditions that led to past successes should enable us to concentrate on actions that work, discard practices that don't and develop new technologies, or revitalize ancient ones, to address current problems.

In moving forward, we must remain focused on the people and habitats of the drylands (arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas), and we therefore need to focus on addressing desertification in these drylands. There are other venues to discuss and address other forms of land degradation. In this cycle of the CSD and in the larger framework of the UNCCD, the focus must remain on the marginalized drylands. We caution against expanding the expressed mandate of the UNCCD beyond that of combating desertification in drylands. We look forward to implementation of the Ten-Year Strategic Plan and enhancing the bottom-up approach and local community-based solutions of the UNCCD.