Statement by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) on Droughts

Thank you Mr Chairman.

Several speakers on the panel referred to the importance of meteorological and hydrological droughts. It is important to recognize that sustainable development of countries affected by drought can only come about through concerted efforts based on a sound understanding of the different factors that contribute to droughts around the world. I wish to emphasize the importance of integrating and coordinating the collection, analysis and exchange of relevant short term and long term data and information to ensure systematic observation of droughts in affected areas and to understand better and assess the processes and effects of drought. Research into the causes and effects of climate variations and long-term climate predictions with a view to providing early warning is essential.

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) contributes to understanding of droughts through dedicated observations of the climate system; improvements in the application of agrometeorological methods and the proper assessment and management of water resources; advances in climate science and prediction; and promotion of capacity building in the application of meteorological and hydrological data and information in drought preparedness and management. In this context, WMO will continue to address the issue of droughts through its Agricultural Meteorology Programme, Hydrology and Water Resources Programme, and other scientific and technical programmes in six major areas:

First, advocating for enhanced observing systems at national, regional and international levels. WMO is committed to improve the observing systems for weather, climate and water resources. In this regard, WMO has embarked in two new activities that should further strengthen our contribution. First, was the establishment by our Fourteenth Congress of a new major crosscutting programme, the WMO Space Programme, while only in existence less than three years, it has already greatly enhanced access and utilization of satellite data, products and services throughout all WMO and supported programmes. WMO Members now benefit from access to not only operational meteorological satellites but also from relevant Research and Development environmental satellites. The second activity is the new Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS). GEOSS has a demanding ten-year implementation plan addressing needs in nine societal benefit areas. Not since the World Weather Watch was formed over 40 years ago has this much high-level attention been given to observations. WMO Members have responded very positively and already committed several key systems to be part of GEOSS. Additionally, WMO is privileged to host the GEO Secretariat in Geneva.

Second, promoting effective early warning systems, which also serve as an essential and important alert mechanism. WMO's World Climate Programme will continue to issue routine statements on the state of El Niño or La Niña, which, through the NMHSs, can alert Governments to ensure preparedness against the impacts of El Niño-related anomalies, which can trigger droughts. WMO's new major programme on Natural Disaster Prevention and Mitigation will provide the focus for the consolidation of its efforts in the area of early warnings and for taking new initiatives in this area in collaboration with other organizations.

Third, further enhancing climate prediction capability through the Climate Variability (CLIVAR) project of the World Climate Research Programme (WCRP) and through the implementation of the WMO Climate Information and Prediction Services (CLIPS) project, which is designed to promote the use of climate information and prediction services, capacity building, multi-disciplinary research and the development of new applications.

*Fourth, assessing vulnerability and analyzing hazards by employing t*he knowledge of vulnerability at the local, national and regional levels which is an important factor in evaluating the adequacy of early warnings.

Fifth, implementing risk management applications to combat droughts. In this context, hazard mapping, suitable agroclimatic zoning and the establishment of partnerships are essential tools for land use and preparedness planning. Several expert teams established by the Commission for Agricultural Meteorology (CAgM) of WMO are examining these issues critically and are issuing guidance reports for the users.

Finally, supporting the strengthening of the capabilities of the countries and regional institutions with drought-related programmes and promote collaboration with other institutions in drought- and desertification-prone regions, with emphasis on Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the northern Mediterranean region, which are all referred to in the Regional Annexes to the Convention. Examples of such institutions in Africa are the AGRHYMET Centre and the African Centre of Meteorological Applications for Development (ACMAD), both located in Niamey, Niger, and the WMO - supported IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre (ICPAC) and the SADC Drought Monitoring Centre (DMC) for Eastern and Southern Africa located in Nairobi, Kenya and Gaborone, Botswana, respectively.

WMO, in collaboration with the UNCCD Secretariat, helped establish a Drought Management Center for South Eastern Europe in 2007. The Centre, located in Ljubljana, Slovenia will serve 12 countries in South Eastern Europe.

Currently, we are working with OECD and the UNCCD Secretariat to establish a similar Drought Management Centre for Central Asia to serve five countries ie., Kajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Thank you.