

Children and Youth Major Group  
Desertification  
Wednesday 7 May 2008 at 3-6pm Session

### **Youth Statement**

Thank you Mr. Chairman for the opportunity to speak. In more than 100 countries, 1 billion of the over 6 billion of the world's population are affected by drought and desertification. About 3.6 billion of the world's 5.2 billion hectares of useful dryland for agriculture has suffered erosion and soil degradation. This is an urgent issue because desertification is taking place right now, but we are at the point where we can still make a change in the right direction. If we don't act now, it could be too late. Desertification is devouring more than 20,000 square miles of land worldwide every year, and affects 74% of the land in North America and more than 2.4 million acres of land (73% of its drylands) in Africa. In countries around the world, citizens are destroying forests for fuel and to create more land for agriculture. Deforestation leads to erosion and in turn desertification. This issue is directly related to children and youth. As desertification takes over more arable land, there will be less crops and less nutrients for children who need them most. There will be no future for youth in the agricultural sector if agricultural lands are taken over by deserts.

It is possible to find solutions to desertification through education, awareness, water use reduction, and the use of traditional rain water harvesting techniques. In the case of the Maradi district in Niger, desertification was reversed using "zai", traditional planting pits. In another case in Niger, farmers from the Illela district visited farms in the Yatenga region of Burkina Faso to observe their traditional water harvesting techniques. After visiting the Yatenga region, several of the Illela district farmers applied newly observed techniques including, changing the size of the planting pits, placing soil from the holes down-slope to allow runoff to collect in the holes, and applying manure to the holes.

As the future generations who will inherit the increasingly arid earth, the children and youth major group are ready to contribute their ideas and energy to raising awareness and implementing solutions.