

20 September 2011

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser,  
President of the 66<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly,  
at the Closing of the High-Level Meeting on “Addressing  
Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought in the Context of  
Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication”**

Excellencies, Heads of State and Government, Mr. Secretary-General, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

You have just completed an intensive day of discussions on an urgent issue. I would like to thank you for your constructive and substantive interactive debate, undertaken in a spirit of cooperation and true commitment to protecting Planet Earth. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Co-Chairs of today's round tables for their efforts.

Before we close this meeting, I would ask you to consider a startling fact: hunger kills more people every year than AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined. And much of the world's hunger is caused by interlinked issues including desertification, land degradation, drought and climate change.

Desertification is, therefore, not only killing people but killing our development and our future. As is so often the case, it is the world's poorest populations who are the most vulnerable. We are witnessing this in the current famine gripping the Horn of Africa. Let me reiterate my call for urgent action by the General Assembly to protect these populations.

In the face of such adversity, we must act on what we already know: that prevention is the most effective way to cope with desertification. Efforts to reduce pressures on dry lands and combat desertification need to go hand in hand with efforts to eradicate poverty and will contribute to meeting the MDGs. We must also support all efforts aimed at disaster risk prevention and strengthen disaster management capacities at all levels, including information and early warning systems.

This year, with a number of important global conferences on sustainable development, we have the opportunity to ensure a higher priority for desertification, land degradation and drought not only as an environmental concern but as integral component of sustainable development. I urge you all to participate actively and to ensure a successful outcome based on consensus.

Excellencies, Heads of State and Government, Mr. Secretary-General, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

We have before us a grave and growing threat to development and our Earth's natural resources. It is up to you to ensure there is the necessary political will and international solidarity to combat desertification. I will count on your active and full support.

Thank you.