

13 October 2011

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser,
President of the 66th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Tenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United
Nations Convention to Combat Desertification**

His Excellency Mr. Kim Hwang-sik, Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea
His Excellency Mr. Lee Don Koo, Minister of Forest Services and President of COP10,
Mr. Du Kwan Kim, Governor of Gyeongnam Province,
United Nations Under-Secretary General Mr. Sha Zukang,
UNCCD Executive Secretary,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Republic of Korea for hosting the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

This is my first visit in my capacity as President of the General Assembly to Korea and to the Asian continent. I am very pleased to be with you here today.

On the 20th of September 2011, the United Nations General Assembly convened a high-level meeting on the theme “Addressing Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought in the context of Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication”.

It is my honour to present today the Chair’s Summary from this high-level meeting.

It was indeed an historic meeting. Over 100 world leaders participated - the first time the General Assembly has discussed desertification at the level of Heads of State.

In their discussions, many leaders stressed that addressing desertification is an issue of high priority. Desertification and land degradation are a global phenomena and need to be tackled wherever they occur. Desertification is not only harming people but it is harming our development and our future. Unless it is addressed urgently, the three pillars of sustainable development will be corroded – social, economic and environmental.

World leaders emphasised that efforts to reduce pressures on drylands and to combat desertification should go hand in hand with efforts to eradicate poverty. This is a necessary step towards attaining the Millennium Development Goals.

Leaders expressed their deep concern about the ongoing famine in the Horn of Africa. This famine has brought our attention, once again, to the urgent need to address the inter-linkages between desertification, land degradation, drought, climate change, food insecurity, and political instability.

Four priority actions were identified.

The first priority action is to strengthen the scientific base, to better comprehend desertification, land degradation and drought - “DLDD”. Many leaders and one regional group suggested establishing an advisory panel. The panel would focus exclusively on DLDD issues. It would provide authoritative and consensual expert advice, in order to enhance effective decision-making on measures to reverse DLDD, effectively build resilience to drought, and break the nexus between drought and famine.

The second priority action is to address the accelerating trends in land degradation in all ecosystems, not only in the drylands. It was pointed out that if we wait until other ecosystems are degraded and desertified to act, we risk undermining our ability to ensure sustainable development and to realize the MDGs. In this respect, implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and its ten year strategic plan as a global policy and monitoring framework should be enhanced.

The third priority action is reversing DLDD through a set of measurable, sustainable development targets. It is also necessary to move towards “zero net land degradation”. This is part of our commitment to build a land degradation neutral world. The upcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development – Rio+20 - should also adopt this important policy decision.

The fourth and final priority action is to improve the financing framework for implementing the international strategy to combat land degradation and poverty. Reversing land degradation is a high-yielding investment. Investing in sustainable land management is far more cost-effective than fixing the consequences of neglect. A number of delegations noted that investment in sustainable land management should be an integral part of shifting to a green economy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The High-level meeting on desertification has delivered substantive recommendations.

Looking ahead to Rio+20 and beyond, the COP 10 deliberations on the Chair’s Summary must help to take the necessary measures to follow up on these important recommendations made by world leaders.

It is now up to you, the Member States, to ensure that the high-level meeting’s outcome is endorsed and implemented, for the benefit of populations worldwide who are suffering under the scourges of desertification, land degradation and drought.

I commend the Republic of Korea for its bold leadership in this respect.

Thank you.