

17 June 2014

**Message of H.E. John W. Ashe
President of the 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly,
for World Day to Combat Desertification**

For four decades, the international community has worked to tackle desertification and land degradation. Today, more than 2 billion hectares of land are degraded including over half of all the Earth's agricultural land. Furthermore, land degradation is not only a problem in the world's drylands. Most of the deterioration is happening in humid areas. With the ongoing impact of global climate change, we will continue to witness extreme weather events, which will in turn lead to even more land degradation.

As we look to implement the Post-2015 Development Agenda, I encourage Member States and other stakeholders to work together to mitigate patterns of desertification in order to meet our daily needs, especially to produce food.

Climate change can profoundly alter the relationship between water and the land. The amount and quality of the land we have today will be very different from what we will have in the future. Unless we act swiftly to ensure all the land we have can withstand soil erosion and to prevent the loss of underground fresh water and the intrusion of salt water into underground fresh water, we will not have enough arable land to feed the world's population.

We must ensure every ecosystem big or small is protected against extreme or erratic weather. It is in our power to do so, if we are willing to invest in land-based adaptation across the world: hence the call for this year's theme: "Land belongs to the future, let's climate proof it."

The world's commitment to achieving a land-degradation neutral world is a bold step and must be concretized through common targets and clear indicators of success. And it must be backed by action plans with investments. The United Nations General Assembly, through its working group, is determined to make this aspiration a concrete outcome of the sustainable development goals. This is the future we want.

A land-degradation neutral world should be a global norm for our generation. Let us, the global community, pursue it relentlessly, because each flood, drought, landslide, tornado, heat wave or coastal submersion robs us of an invaluable natural asset – productive land.