

STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE SECRETARIAT OF THE
UN CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION

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ON THE THEMATIC CLUSTER “LAND”
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Thank you for giving the UNCCD an opportunity to present its views on the important issue of land. As the only legally universal agreement on land issues that systematically addresses land degradation and desertification there are some important additional elements to which we would wish to draw the attention of the CSD.

Let me start with a basic, perhaps self evident fact, but of which we need to remind ourselves when discussing land. Land and the fragile upper crust – soil-- is the basis of all terrestrial life. An inch of soil can take centuries to build up but be blown away in a few seasons. Each year, it has been estimated that the continents lose 24 billions tonnes of topsoil. The crisis is most acute in the drylands which stretch across more than a third of the earth’s land surface. 70% of the 5.2 billion hectares of drylands used for agriculture around the world are already degraded.

Combating land degradation and desertification needs to be high among the priorities of the international community, Major policy interventions and commitment by the international community in terms of prioritizing investment in land and sustainable land management is necessary to prevent and reverse land degradation and desertification and thereby achieve the MDG goals. In this context we would like to point out that the UNCCD is an important tool to combat poverty. It is also an important platform for adaptation to climate change.

The UNCCD has recently adopted a Ten-year Strategic Plan to make the Convention a systemic and global response to issues affecting land and its ecosystems. The Strategy highlights the importance of forging a global coalition to combat desertification, land degradation and drought in the present context of climate change.

It would also be useful if all the UN agencies, organizations, Multilateral Environmental Conventions etc dealing with different aspects of land e.g. FAO, UNEP, CBD IFAD, etc could come together under the aegis of the UNCCD to forge a “land coalition” to build on synergies among the various UN entities.

The time has also come for the international community to give the necessary political impetus to evolve a Protocol to the UNCCD to protect the soils.

The present cycle of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development should mobilize greater attention in investing in the fight against DLDD. This would contribute substantively to achievement of the MDG goals in achieving poverty eradication and sustainable development and assist developing countries in particular in adapting to the adverse impact of climate change.