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Sustainable development vital for populations in arid lands, Ban says



Desertification is caused by climatic variations and human actions

17 June 2011 –

The estimated two billion people living in the world's arid lands are among those most vulnerable to hunger and climate change, [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon warned today, calling for sustainable development to ensure those areas are productive enough to support their populations.

“The management, conservation and sustainable development of dry forests are central to combating desertification,” Mr. Ban said in a message marking World Day to Combat Desertification, which is celebrated on 17 June.

He emphasized that degraded land can be made productive through sustainable practices.

The UN General Assembly designated 2011 as the International Year of Forests to bring attention to the value of forests and the social, economic and environmental costs of their loss. The theme of this year's World Day to Combat Desertification is “Forests keep drylands working.”

In his message, Mr. Ban advocated for investment in drylands for the betterment of local communities.

“Too often, investing in drylands has been seen as unproductive or risky, instead of a necessary avenue for improving the well-being of local communities and national economies,” he said.

Through the upcoming events of the General Assembly’s high-level meeting on desertification, land degradation and drought in September and the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development in June 2012, the Secretary-General urged governments and their partners to “bring greater focus to the quest for solutions to this urgent challenge of sustainable development.”

UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)) Executive Director Achim Steiner noted the importance of forests for the livelihood of the residents of the world’s drylands.

“The analysis indicates that investing an additional \$40 billion a year in the forestry sector could halve deforestation rates by 2030, increase rates of tree planting by around 140 per cent by 2050 and catalyze the creation of millions of new jobs” stated Mr. Steiner.

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNCCD) is recognizing this year’s World Day to Combat Desertification with an environmental non-governmental organization (NGO) in Spain through a ceremony to designate the soccer star Carlos Marchena as a Drylands Ambassador of the UNCCD.

In recognition of the Day, Lesotho is celebrating a successful tree-planting effort and revival of previously degraded land in Leribe district. In Senegal, activities include a tree planting ceremony, while events are also being staged in Egypt, Argentina, the Republic of Korea, Iran and Benin.

The Day, first observed in 1995, is designed to serve as a reminder that desertification is a problem that can be addressed through community participation and cooperation.

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