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## **Speakers at UN conference stress reversing desertification to combat poverty**



17 October 2011 –

Key speakers at the United Nations conference in the Republic of Korea on combating desertification today stressed that restoring degraded lands is crucial to addressing some global challenges, including poverty, food scarcity and the loss of the world's biodiversity.

“If we protect, restore and manage land and soils we can tackle many challenges simultaneously, such as poverty, food and energy insecurity, biodiversity loss, climate change, forced migration and geopolitical instability,” said [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon in a video [message](#) to the

Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in Changwon, Republic of Korea.

“These issues are linked. The stakes are high, let us therefore work together to make intelligent land use a cornerstone of sustainable development,” Mr. Ban told the opening of the Conference’s High-level segment.

Many of the issues discussed related to the restoration of productive lands, including finding indicators to measure poverty and land degradation, sustainable land management and food security. Over the next 25 years land degradation could reduce global food production by as much as 12 per cent leading to a 30 per cent increase in world food prices, according to experts at the conference.

“None of us want the 21st Century to be one of recurrent food and humanitarian crises,” said Sha Zukang, the Secretary-General of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), which will be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, next year.

Luc Gnacadja, the UNCCD Executive Secretary, emphasized that desertification inevitably led to poverty and food insecurity. “Degraded lands mean degraded lives. But degraded lands are not dead lands; they are sick lands in need of stewardship. In that regard, there is a statement of hope coming from the grassroots level, which we must enhance and sustain.”

Kim Hwang-sik, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea, pointed out that 12 million hectares of land – an area larger his country – is being degraded every year. “It is our responsibility to protect the environment and refrain from unsustainable land use practices,” he said.

As productive land declines in size, providing food for the 9 billion people projected inhabit the world in 2050 will require a 70 per cent increase in global food production.

Prince Charles of the United Kingdom, also via a video message, stressed the importance of linkages between issues that could be addressed through combating desertification and restoring degraded land.

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