

Ban urges greater focus on drought, desertification in combating climate change



Desertification is caused by climatic variations and human actions

28 September 2009 – Desertification, land degradation and drought are among today's most pressing global environment challenges, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said, urging greater attention to these issues in the fight against climate change, which he said has tended to focus on cutting greenhouse gas emissions. "Desertification and land degradation destabilize societies, entrench poverty and exacerbate climate change," Mr. Ban said in a **message** to the Ninth Session of the Conference of Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, taking place in Buenos Aires, Argentina. "Expanding deserts suffocate livelihoods and ways of life. The more than two billion people who live on the world's drylands are also among the poorest and most vulnerable. They bear the brunt of change and are least able to cope," he said. The Secretary-General noted that in addressing climate change, the international community has tended "quite understandably" to focus on cutting greenhouse gas emissions. But tackling the issue in all its complexity also requires going beyond mitigation, and taking into account the intrinsic linkages between desertification, land degradation and climate change. "Three-quarters of all disasters globally are now climate-related, up from half just a decade ago, and we can expect worse," he stated, adding that these disasters are exacerbated by desertification and land degradation. "There is only one way forward. We must strengthen our ability to adapt to a changing climate," Mr. Ban said. Sustainable land management can make a critical contribution through carbon sequestration, land reclamation and efforts to combat soil loss and restore vegetation. Such steps can not only strengthen resilience, but also enhance agricultural production, food security and economic development, he pointed out. The Secretary-General said that when world leaders gather in Copenhagen in December to seal a new agreement to curb greenhouse gas emissions, "the land agenda – and most of all the people who rely on the land for their jobs, sustenance and very survival – should be part of the picture."

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