

## UN names Drylands Ambassadors to raise awareness on land degradation



Executive Secretary of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification Luc Gnacadja

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The United Nations today announced the appointment of two Drylands Ambassadors – a renowned expert on agriculture and forests and a South African gospel singer – to help raise international awareness about the problem of land degradation.

Dennis Garrity, the former director general of the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), and South African gospel singer Deborah Fraser were named Ambassadors by Luc Gnacadja, the Executive Secretary of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification ([UNCCD](#)).

They will serve in that capacity alongside the Spanish soccer ace Carlos Marchena, who was previously designated as a Drylands Ambassador.

“Politicians and other leaders are often accused of being all talk and no action. Drylands Ambassadors are just the opposite,” said Mr. Gnacadja. “Their role is entirely action-orientated. Like our earlier Sustainable Land Management (SLM) Champions such as the President of Future Forest, Kwon Byong-hyon of the Republic of Korea, they are ordinary people who achieve extraordinary things.”

Dr. Garrity headed ICRAF, which is based in Nairobi, Kenya, from 2001 until last month. His extensive career and global experience made him an ideal champion of drylands, according to Mr. Gnacadja.

“His work on developing agroforestry alternatives to slash-and-burn agriculture is widely recognized, as are his efforts to develop institutional innovations related to farmer-led organizations in sustainable agriculture and natural resources management.”

Accepting the nomination, Dr. Garrity said: “I will, in particular, hope to contribute to the Secretariat’s efforts to highlight the role of agroforestry, evergreen agriculture, and farmer-managed natural regeneration as critical opportunities for making vast progress on the ground in the regeneration of healthy farms and ecosystems.”

Ms. Fraser, or Debs as she is popularly known in music circles, is regarded by many as a South African gospel superstar, a title she resists.

“People make me a superstar and treat me that way. But I am not a superstar. I just regard myself as an ordinary God-fearing person. Today’s enemy is poverty and ignorance, and it has to be fought with all the might at our disposal,” she said after her appointment. “There are a lot of people who go hungry and yet there is land they could be utilizing profitably.”

Mr. Gnacadja pointed out that every decade the world loses an area of productive land equivalent to the size of South Africa – 1.2 million square kilometres – through desertification, land degradation and drought.

“I am delighted that the tremendous musical talent of Deborah Fraser can be harnessed in spreading global awareness.”

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