

Statement by

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**on the occasion of the Third
International Conference on SIDs**

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(Please check against delivery)

Mr. President,

Allow me at the outset to express, on behalf of the UNCCD Executive secretary, our sincere appreciation to the Government and the people of the Independent State of Samoa for efforts made to host this Conference. Twenty years after Barbados, ten years after Mauritius, the world has changed, and not slightly. Climate change discourse has also evolved, especially within the SIDs agenda. This is understandable for its effects are impacting negatively their sustainable development while imperilling their very survival. Many of them are already bearing the brunt of its negative effects.

Mr. President,

Over a decade ago, I was sent to this region, with the mission to encourage Pacific SIDs to become Parties to the UNCCD, the only UN binding treaty addressing the problem of land degradation. The point I made with the political leadership in this region was that as much as climate change was a tremendous threat to SIDs, safeguarding SIDs land resources was of paramount importance for the twinning of land degradation and climate change continued to drive each other in a cyclical downward spiral. Today, all SIDs are Parties to the UNCCD. As such, they are reaping dividends in this capacity by receiving a financial support to implement sustainable land management projects, notably from the GEF.

Mr. President,

During the last three days, we did not hear that much references to land degradation as a threat to SIDs. This is a threat which, if not adequately addressed, will render them more vulnerable and less resilient to climate change shocks. Nevertheless, nobody can deny the high profile that land degradation is having on the global agenda, including within the SIDs constituency.

For the first time, from Barbados to Mauritius, SIDs are acknowledging, in the Samoa Pathway, that addressing desertification, land degradation and drought challenges will be critical to them to the achievement of food security and nutrition, adaptation to climate change, protection of biodiversity, and creation of resilience to natural disasters. This is good news for a constituency where land degradation agenda has not been always seen as a pressing priority.

Mr. President,

According to a report prepared by UNEP for this conference, land degradation is one of the emerging issues that Small Islands will continue to face in the years to come. The report warns that SIDs are reaching the limit of land capacity as most them are characterized by limited land resources, which are

under increasing demands and intense pressures from multiple and competing uses as well as from climate change and extreme events.

In fact, due to SIDs small sizes and dependence on agriculture, the loss of just one hectare of productive land to land degradation is a substantial loss. Small Islands cannot afford to degrade their land.

Mr. President,

There is a growing recognition of sustainable land management as a determining factor in both mitigating and adapting to climate change. It has been estimated that better land management could, globally, help sequester up to 30% of total emissions. In turn as land becomes degraded, it loses the capacity to capture and store carbon, which is released into the atmosphere contributing to further global warming. This is the reason why we, in the UNCCD secretariat, have been advocating for the SIDs adaptation to climate change through land-based adaptation activities, notably sustainable land management.

Mr. President,

Next year is a critical year. The international community is poised to adopt a new development agenda anchored around new sustainable development goals (SDGs). As far as land degradation is concerned, a powerful message stemmed from Rio+20 Conference whereby world leaders committed to strive to achieve a land degradation neutral world. Desertification and land degradation are now proposed to be part of the sustainable developments goals with a target of achieving land degradation neutrality. The year 2015 is also the year to agree on a new climate change regime. I invite the SIDs to use those avenues to secure provisions for land-based adaptation to climate change.

In conclusion Mr. President, time has come for the SIDs to move land degradation to the front burner. For their adaptation and resilience to climate change. For their food security. For their energy security. For their human security. I even dare to say, for their political stability. The Executive Secretary is committed to mobilizing the support needed to strengthen land-based climate change adaptation and restoration for all SIDs affected by land degradation.

Thank you