

Statement by the Delegation of Canada to the Sixteenth Session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development

Thursday, May 8, 2008, 3:00 pm – Conservation and rehabilitation of dry-land eco-systems

Mr./Madame Chairperson,

Desertification is defined as the *degradation of land in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities*. Canada has been successful in stopping and reversing the serious land degradation that has occurred in the past. Subsequent research and programming has ensured that improvements in sustainable land management and soil quality continue to be made. Although these activities, which encourage good stewardship of land resources, are not specifically designed to manage drought or combat desertification, they do result in drought amelioration, adaptation to climate change and variability, and reduced desertification.

One of Canada's goals is to become a global leader in environment responsibility. To help ensure that the agriculture industry is on the correct path to achieving this goal, and to help determine the impact policies and programs have on the environment, the Government of Canada established the National Agri-Environmental Health Analysis and Reporting Program. The objective of this program is to establish the capacity to evaluate and regularly report on the general state and trends of agriculture's interactions with the environment, including land degradation.

Land degradation and environmental concerns pose a direct constraint to growth, and could increasingly affect the agriculture industry's ability to serve existing international markets and to compete for new ones. Science based agri-environmental indicators have been developed that can help identify trends with respect to soil erosion, water, air, biodiversity and environmental farm management. These indicators describe the spatial distribution of a given problem and identify causal linkages between driving factors and environmental outcomes.

The program contains a desertification indicator, which is still in development. It is challenging to develop a desertification indicator as land degradation is not the result of a single process. The proposed indicator will be based on: an integrated estimate of erosion that combines wind, water and tillage erosion and accounts for the interactions between them; an assessment of the sensitivity of different landscapes to erosion; and an index based on vegetation productivity measured by remote sensing.

If unaddressed the results of land degradation are very costly and difficult to reverse. Because of these costs more and more efforts are being expended on finding ways to deal with the issue proactively. The ability of the National Agri-Environmental Health

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Analysis and Reporting Program to monitor and report on the state of the land resource is an important part of Canada's response to land degradation and desertification.