

Statement by

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United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

On the occasion of

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Commission on Sustainable Development

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Mr Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen

I wish at the outset to extend my gratitude to you Mr. Chairman for giving me the opportunity to contribute in the dialogue session between Ministers and Heads of UN Agencies and international organisations.

We in the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification consider sustainable energy sources as a strategic area for action and therefore national and regional action programmes give high priority to this thematic in conformity with the provisions of the Convention and relevant decisions of the COP.

The Ministerial segment of the fourth Session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD adopted the so called "Bonn Declaration", which emphasises the need to enhance effort to develop and promote new and renewable energy sources, which are closely associated with the fight against desertification as well as poverty eradication.

Indeed the Parties to the Convention, who to date number 191, have observed that since sustainable energy is an important factor in socio economic development, the potential for renewable sources should be explored further in order to offer alternatives to conventional energy sources. They have pointed out clearly that renewable energy is a strategic area that cannot be separated from combating desertification and poverty eradication.

The general observation, which we have made is that energy sources are at the centre of natural resources degradation in many rural areas of countries affected by desertification. There are various options for renewable energy that have been singled out as alternatives, which can be both beneficial to the welfare of communities in rural and urban households, as well as being environment friendly. These include photovoltaic solar; biomass; wind power; and micro-hydraulics.

The UNCCD Parties have also developed Thematic Programme Networks (TPNs) on Renewable Sources of Energy, in the context of the Regional Action Programmes to Combat Desertification. The mission of these TPNs is among others, to facilitate the development and promotion, as well as utilization of sustainable energy sources, with the aim of assisting in the fight against desertification in the affected regions.

In the regions of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, where country Parties to the UNCCD have elaborated programmes of action to address desertification and land degradation, it has been observed that the poor continue to become both the victims and agents of environmental degradation.

The poverty-environment relationship contributes to natural resources degradation, particularly where a large and growing rural population while struggling to survive in a limited natural resource base, is compelled to over-utilize the available natural resources.

The over-dependence of rural communities on fuel wood to meet their energy requirements has contributed to deforestation, which in turn leads to soil erosion, land degradation and water shortages through the silting of water sources, rivers and dams.

The lack of alternative sources of energy ultimately leads to over-utilization of existing natural resources, which in turn results in environmental degradation and worsening poverty.

It is this environment-poverty-sustainable development nexus that the UN Convention to Combat Desertification aims to address concretely, and in the same vein, we are reminded that for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in this respect, the international community needs to adopt a holistic approach.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate that the development and promotion of the utilization of sustainable energy sources is envisaged to represent additional and essential processes by which the biological and economic potential of arid and semi-arid areas may be conserved and improved. This is a prerequisite for the long-term socio-economic development of the affected communities and the integrated management of natural resources.

The benefits to be accrued in developing sustainable energy sources include stemming the depletion of forest resources and control of the resultant land degradation. In areas affected by drought and desertification, the provision of sustainable energy sources would contribute to increased economic opportunity and reduce ecological stress on the dryland ecosystems.

I thank you all for your kind attention and wish this session every success.