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DESERTIFICATION

Statement by
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Slovenian EU Presidency

on behalf of the European Union
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Mr. Chair!

It is an honour for Slovenia to present statement on behalf of the European Union.

The Candidate Country the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Montenegro, and Serbia as well as the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this statement.*

The fight against desertification and land degradation is a major environmental and development objective.

The inter-linkages between desertification and climate change have arisen strongly after the issuing of the IV IPCC Assessment Report. This is a fundamental finding that should push the international community to use soil conservation as an instrument of mitigation and adaptation to climate change, while improving adaptation measures to desertification, such as early warning systems, reforestation/afforestation, sustainable water management, realizing positive results on both climate change and desertification. The UNCCD should therefore develop a strong expertise on adaptation to climate change and use this background for adaptation measures.

Dryland populations will be severely affected by the adverse impacts of climate change because of multiple stresses and low adaptive capacity. Therefore, adaptation to climate change in drylands is crucial to strengthen the ecosystems' and societies' resilience. This is especially important as climate change has the potential to undermine sustainable development. In order to conceptually and politically assist such interventions, forthcoming IPCC assessments should maintain the focus on climate change impact in drylands.

Dryland ecosystems support biodiversity providing critical ecosystem services on which humanity relies for food, livelihoods and shelter. The arid biodiversity needs to be preserved if we want to maintain the integrity of arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas. The UNCCD and the CBD should act jointly at policy as well as at the project and programme level.

Furthermore, desertification and land degradation affect agricultural capacities threatening food security and jobs and making poor population even poorer in a difficult vicious circle. National sustainable agricultural policies are fundamental frameworks to protect soil and ensure sustenance of population. In this context, there is also an increasing awareness on how multilateral trade rules can impact the agricultural sector and markets and, consequently, desertification and land degradation. This confirms the evidence of the need for UNCCD to work towards innovative networks and synergies.

* The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

Environmental and development cooperation together play an important role at the field level. Both these sectors are undertaking a general review and reform, also within the UN.

In the next 10 years, the main urgent challenge will be the implementation of the newly approved UNCCD Strategy 2008-2018 that will allow the international community to act jointly, set targets and measure results. The EU believes

- that political support and concerted action are needed in order to create an enabling environment for investments in sustainable land management of drylands and to mobilize and improve the targeting and coordination of financial and technological resources in order to increase their impact and effectiveness. In this context complementarities among the GM and the GEF are crucial and collaboration in the context of the UNEP Bali Strategic Plan essential.
- that this is the time for enhancing the mainstreaming of desertification and land degradation in development and climate cooperation to gain policy coherence.
- that efficient science-policy communication among all the numerous actors that contribute to increase the knowledge on desertification and land degradation is needed. Substantial scientific work has been carried out, but information is not sufficiently used and deployed because of the lack of efficient linkages of scientific networks. The improvement and more active involvement of countries into the networks and bodies such as the UNCCD/CST and GMES/GEOSS could assist to the objective of transforming scientific findings into practical solutions on the ground. Research initiatives promoted by the international community such as the CGIAR need to address priority issues for policy making under the UNCCD.
- In the last ten years, since the approval of the UNCCD, the international community has learnt that desertification and land degradation cannot be won in isolation. UNCCD National Action Plans have been designed but have not yet had great impact so far, mainly because they remain 'stand-alone' documents and are not integrated into or linked to other strategies.

Therefore, the EU

- actively supports the reform process of the UNCCD agreed upon as a part of the 10 year strategy;
- is prepared to develop a road map for its own contribution to the implementation of the 10 Year Strategy and supports relevant initiatives;
- has integrated the issue of combating land degradation within its climate partnership with the AU;
- is about to mobilize its relevant scientific portfolio for science targets under the 10 Year Strategy.

Dryland populations are often socially and politically marginalized due to their impoverishment and remoteness from centres of decision-making. This holds true also in some industrial countries recognized by the Convention as affected (e.g. Annex IV and Annex V in Europe). This is why the EU believes that much more efforts are needed to improve the involvement of drylands communities, in particular of women and young people, also through decentralization of policy making.

Increased and fair participation of all stakeholders will allow coping more effectively with critical and specific local problems, such as the preservation of the common natural resources. And success stories should be further diffused.

Several initiatives have already been taken counting on the important EU support and participation, such as Terrafrica, the Bamako Conference on Youth and Desertification and the Beijing Conference on Women and Desertification, Almeira Conference on Desertification and Migration, and Green Wall for the Sahara Initiative.

Thank you.