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DROUGHT

Statement by
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on behalf of the European Union
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Mr. Chair, dear distinguished delegates!

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

In recent years, drought conditions have endangered water resources and agricultural production in many parts of the world, affecting the livelihood of many people, especially dryland populations, with a direct negative impact on poverty, human security and migration.

Recent droughts in developing and developed countries have underscored the sensitivity and social vulnerability of all societies to this natural hazard that, progressively, has occurred in places previously not affected and therefore not prepared to deal with these events. Indeed, as the recent *FAO Crop Prospects and Food Situation* publication has shown, consequences of multiple year droughts have significantly increased the lack of access to food in many developing countries, particularly in those in crisis requiring external assistance.

Drought leads to degradation of the environment by initiating a chain of reactions that result in soil exposure, erosion, land degradation and desertification as well as an increased risk for wild fires which consequently result in significant effects on atmospheric pollution and greenhouse gas emissions also in terms of loss of CO₂ sinks. And the circle is obviously a vicious one.

Projected climate would exacerbate water shortage and quality problems in many water scarce areas in the world. As pressure on water supplies continues to increase, more frequent and severe droughts are a matter of concern in both water-short and water-surplus regions. This will call for a comprehensive response, with respect to climate change mitigation, climate change adaptation, technology-transfer and finance; the Bali roadmap and action plan outline the building blocks for such international response.

The reactions to devastation (environmental, social and economic) through drought management in the world have been fragmented, with little focus on preparedness and mitigation and adaptation. In an effort to be more proactive, there is a clear need for closer cooperation on local, regional and global scale to develop and implement a polyvalent approach to drought planning and management.

The integrated water management approach, as well as the ecosystem approach, have been clearly central in many international instruments such as the UNEP Strategy on Integrated Water Management, CSD 13 decisions and regional and sub-regional instruments (e.g. UN ECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes). However, a global legally binding instrument on water has not yet been approved. Those documents offer key frameworks to fight drought. Their implementation should be further assessed and enhanced where needed, through adequate means of implementation. The sustainable management of water is essential to prevent and adapt to drought, as well as to adapt to the consequences of climate change. Appropriate management of water resources will only be possible through the use of in-depth knowledge in respect of their origin, quantity and quality. Regular informing, advising and warning of the public at large on future variability of water resources will facilitate making the first step towards improving the current conditions.

There are several international actors that cope with drought; however a clear overview of all the actions taken to reduce drought impacts still does not exist.

A similar gap derives from the lack of a global drought management plan, and associated indicators systems. As a consequence, drought impacts and negative effects are still not sufficiently high in the political agenda and this is the reason why the work of existing observatories on drought and environment should be enhanced. Negative impacts on economy and human wellbeing should be avoided through prevention.

Mr Chairman,

Extreme weather phenomena, natural disasters, climate anomalies and fires, severely affect millions of people worldwide, in particularly the poorest people. Further, as surface temperature has increased over the past decades, so have the damages caused by extreme weather events. Direct losses from natural disasters are already as high as US\$ 100 billion annually.

High preparedness is a priority. It could be achieved through prior knowledge of the magnitude of events, effective drought recovery plans, drought management plans that include preventing and recovery measures, drought early warning systems, risk management, diffusion of technologies to address water scarcity and the creation of drought observatories.

Regional cooperation must be enhanced to improve these efforts.

The EU believes that

- Adaptation strategies need to take into account increased risks for more frequent and prolonged drought;
- Special attention must be paid to the sustainable use of deep groundwater use, which provide strategic reserves for extreme water scarcity, but which are at risk of overexploitation;
- Sustainable land management and preservation of scarce water resources are closely interlinked in drylands and that
- the UNCCD Strategy 2008-2018 provides the international community with the appropriate framework to serve this mission.

Thank you.