



SECRETARIAT OF THE CONVENTION TO
COMBAT DESERTIFICATION

SECRETARIAT DE LA CONVENTION SUR LA LUTTE
CONTRE LA DESERTIFICATION

STATEMENT BY

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Convention to Combat Desertification

On the Occasion of the GEF Council

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Washington DC

Mr Mohamed El-Ashry, Chief Executive Officer and Chairman,
Co-Chair of GEF Council,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Council Members,
Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to congratulate you Mr. Co-Chair for your election. Indeed, I feel very privileged to see you co-chairing this meeting 2 months after COP.5 has taken place in Switzerland where the Swiss Government did its best to ensure a successful organization of the Conference which led to further CCD institutional development. The COP was attended at the highest level considering the number of Head of States and Governments who traveled to your Country to participate at the Conference. I would like through you to convey our sincere thanks to your Government.

Allow me also of course to express my sincere gratitude to Mr. Mohamed El-Ashry, for his kind invitation to address this important gathering and for his efforts towards the establishment of very good working relationships between our two Secretariats.

Co-Chairs, Colleagues,

It has always been a pleasure and honour for me to have this opportunity to address this meeting of the GEF Council.

As you are all well aware, this GEF Council meeting represents for us in the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, a very significant milestone in our endeavors to improve the implementation of the Convention.

The expressions of support already made in this Council, and the steadfast way in which you, distinguished members, have shown that you are ready to come along with us is indeed commendable.

During the Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD, which was held in Geneva last October, the message of the Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of GEF was well received. The Conference of the Parties adopted a decision encouraging this Council to take the necessary next steps to finalise the intentions of your decision of last May, by designating the land degradation as a focal area of the GEF. Indeed the decision by this Council last May on this matter, was hailed by²

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the COP as a major breakthrough that demonstrates the willingness of this Council to ensure that the implementation of the UNCCD receives the necessary support in line with the support provided to the other global environmental issues.

The decision constitutes a strong message to affected countries that the international community is coming up with more vigorous and unprecedented support to accompany them in their daily fight to reclaim their degraded land. For a Convention whose main thrust is definitely sustainable development in the arid lands, the Council decision and subsequent steps for its operationalisation will be echoed by the Johannesburg Summit as a major step in the implementation of Agenda 21, particularly its chapter 12. Already, as we are approaching this big event, we all feel a tremendous pressure to move the relationship between the CCD and GEF forward.

The recent regional preparatory meetings to the Summit, from Africa to Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean as well as the last month Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Group of 77, all those urged for a formal decision on this matter.

Co-Chairs of Council,
Distinguished Members,

I would like to take a minute or so to share with you a few points concerning the reason why I said that this GEF Council meeting represents an important turning point for all those friends of the UNCCD, who would wish to see a more effective implementation of this instrument.

Those Parties to the Convention that are affected by desertification and drought have a hope that their earnest efforts can be supplemented by the Global Environment Facility. They are aware that the GEF can provide some resources for enabling activities and catalytic funding to help them articulate their priorities at the national and regional levels through the action programmes that are a requirement as frameworks for implementation of the Convention.

As I speak to you today, no less than forty two affected country Parties have gone through the rigorous process of preparing their own National Action Programmes, which in itself is a daunting task for those countries.

As you know, the first principle of the UNCCD urges Parties to ensure that

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decisions on the design and implementation of programmes to combat desertification are taken with the participation of populations and local communities, and that an enabling environment is created at higher levels to facilitate action at national and local levels. This emphasis on a "bottom-up" with strong local participation in decision-making represents a radical departure from tradition, as the Convention puts the local communities on an equal footing with other actors in the development process.

Another principle of the UNCCD invites Parties to develop, in a spirit of partnership, co-operation among all levels of government, communities, non-governmental organisations and landholders to establish a better understanding of the nature and value of land and scarce water resources in affected areas and to work towards their sustainable use. This concept of promoting interactive relationships within the affected countries is emphasised in the Convention, in order to have the local communities become part and parcel of the search for solutions to problems afflicting them.

The UNCCD also lays special emphasis on the economic environment, both internationally and within nations, and makes it clear that this must be arranged so as to enable desertification to be tackled effectively. Parties are also obliged to integrate their anti-desertification efforts with strategies for poverty eradication. Partnership arrangements between developed and developing country Parties are also encouraged.

The UNCCD provides a watershed opportunity, a tool with the potential to reduce the vulnerability of affected populations, by securing their environment, increasing food security, and creating new opportunities for alternative livelihoods. Successful implementation of the Convention would improve living conditions, and alleviate poverty, and stem the other associated problems such as loss of biological diversity, climate change, the availability of water and other related problems.

Allow me now to touch on the issue of *Possible GEF Interventions*:

Under the UNCCD, affected developing country Parties are called upon to prepare and implement action programmes at national, sub-regional and regional levels, as appropriate. At country level, the national action programme (NAP) is the key operational tool for transforming the provisions of the Convention into concrete actions and measures to combat desertification. The NAP framework sets out various expectations, as well as challenges to be overcome. It also⁴ represents an opportunity to galvanize the necessary partnerships among the

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affected communities, the government functionaries, the non-governmental organisations, the community-based organisations, the private sector, the academic and scientific community. It clearly presents a rallying point with objectives for the sustainable development process to take shape, particularly where this is needed, at the local level.

With regard to *Types of Interventions*:

It is our considered opinion that enhancing GEF support for the implementation of the UNCCD would require an alternative approach that builds upon the experience of GEF-funded activities in land degradation, focussing on the implementation frameworks of the UNCCD that have been put in place by the Parties at the various levels.

With regard to *Enabling activities*:

In order for GEF to effectively support implementation of the UNCCD, enabling activities as well as catalytic funding for priority activities are the key areas where support should be directed. The elaboration and implementation of action programmes are very seriously hampered due to lack of predictable financial resources required by the Parties.

The Parties to the UNCCD realize that the long-term success of implementation of the Convention very much depends upon a number of factors, among them, the actions and issue areas that the NAPs, SRAPs and RAPs encompass, the management of the process for defining and identifying these priority actions, and more importantly, the provision of predictable sources of funding to support the action programmes. In encouraging the elaboration and implementation of the national action programmes, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention (COP), requires all countries to have completed preparing their NAPs by the year 2005. There are countries that have gone through the process of formulating their NAPs, and these are at different stages of elaboration and development. In others, the process is still underway.

The Conference of the Parties to the Convention, by its decisions has requested Parties to prepare national reports on measures that they have taken for the implementation of the Convention. The reports cover the activities that have been undertaken at the individual country level, the sub-regional as well as the continental levels. It is important therefore that GEF assistance would focus on supporting the elaboration of Action Programmes and the preparation of national reports.

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Let me conclude by referring to the issue on the *Role of the GEF*:

Experience from other focal areas shows that the role of the GEF as a catalyst has been effective in providing predictable financial resources for projects. With predictable financial resources for enabling activities, countries can elaborate strategies for addressing concretely the problems that they are confronted with, the needs for meeting their obligations and moreover, to articulate ways and means for long term implementation of the Convention.

Distinguished Council Members,
Ladies and Gentlemen

The UNCCD represents a significant achievement of the international community. It is innovative, and provides new impetus in international relations between the developing countries affected by drought and desertification, and the developed countries. It provides a framework in which both developing and developed countries, inter-governmental institutions, international agencies, non-governmental organisations and others can enter into new partnerships for progress.

I hope that the decisions of this Council will help to further the ideals of the GEF support to a truly more effective implementation of the UNCCD, because this is what those millions of people that are not with us in this room have been eagerly expecting.

I thank you for your kind attention and wish this meeting a successful outcome.