

**United Nations Conference to Combat Desertification  
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**High-Level Segment**

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**Statement by**

**Naoko Ishii, CEO and Chairperson, Global Environment Facility**

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Excellencies and colleagues,

It is a great honor for me to address the High-Level Segment of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification COP.

First, I wish to congratulate the Chinese Government for its vision to host the Conference of the Parties to UNCCD here in Ordos, a region strongly affected by desertification and degradation. With more than a quarter of the country affected by land degradation, China has been making great strides to combat against land degradation, one of the biggest challenges humanity is now facing.

Just yesterday, my team had an opportunity to visit a project near Ordos managed by Chinese State Forestry Administration with local partners, supported by GEF. It is so exciting to witness the fruits of long-term, large-scale, and

comprehensive efforts to control desertification. With proximity to action, this COP presents an opportunity for all of us to learn from the Chinese experiences of sustainable land management, which is firmly positioned within the country's goal of ecological civilization, and to reaffirm our commitment to partnerships to address the land agenda.

Colleagues, we are facing the largest challenge in a history of mankind. We are pushing the vital Earth systems towards and beyond the tipping point, with devastating consequences on our land, forests, water, oceans, and our lives. With the world's population rising to nine billion by mid-century, with a rising middle class, there is no other option than to transform current economic systems, and production and consumption patterns. We need to take a holistic, systemic approaches to rise this challenge.

Land is central to this agenda. And I want to highly recognize that this Convention is an absolute frontrunner, it is moving fast, with commitments and actions.

I want to make three points.

First, at COP12 in Ankara, just a few weeks after the agreement on the SDGs, countries made an important, and very timely decision on "land degradation neutrality" that strives to achieve target 15.3 of the SDGs. UNCCD was the first Convention to formally embrace the 2030 Agenda and relevant goals and targets. LDN can be a strong vehicle to drive implementation of UNCCD decision.

Second, the UNCCD is a front runner in recognizing the power of integration and in promoting holistic approaches, as land is naturally a meeting place and an integrator of key environmental areas such as biodiversity, soil, water and climate. When countries tackle the sustainability agenda, they are increasingly recognizing the importance of the land agenda as the catalyst for sound economic and social systems. The UNCCD is the first convention that requested the GEF to address SDGs, which are based on the principles of integration.

Third, the UNCCD emphasizes the importance of working together with the private sector. Smallholder farmers and forest workers need to be supported for their sustainable livelihood by being linked to the markets. In this regard, a proposed Land Neutrality Fund is eying to tap the capital markets by creating innovative business opportunities in this space to scale up investments which may not happen without public and private partnership. The GEF is pleased to announce our support for the LDN Fund by providing resources for technical assistance and de-risking.

These three points demonstrate that the UNCCD are making heroic move with commitments and actions against the daunting challenge we are jointly facing. I would like to congratulate Monique Barbut, Executive Secretary, for her determination and leadership.

On my side, I am very thankful for the trust given to the GEF, and we are doing our best to respond. Since the last COP, the GEF has supported voluntary LDN target setting in 60 countries, built capacities for LDN, catalyzed the role of the

private sector, and moving beyond target setting, already invested \$60 million to address LDN. Altogether, 60 projects totaling over \$580 million of GEF resources have been programmed in the past two years. With 49 out of the 60 projects being multi-focal, our portfolio shows that these investments generate multiple benefits and offer significant synergies beyond land, including zero hunger, climate mitigation and adaptation, ensuring access to clean water, securing biodiversity *among other SDG themes*.

Colleagues and friends, as some of you may know, we, the GEF, are in the middle of the discussion on the GEF7 replenishment, a discussion on the next four-year investment cycle. This gathering at COP gives us a valuable opportunity to hear from you directly on your national priorities and discuss in what way the GEF can best serve the goal of this Convention.

Our ambition is high, since the task ahead is enormous. We must work together with urgency to bring about transformations through political leadership, coalitions for change, and innovation. The GEF is committed to working with you in this journey towards a new generation of global stewardship, through land.

Thank you very much.