

*Message from Mr. Luc Gnacadja, Executive Secretary
of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).
On the Occasion of the African Environment Day, 3 March 2008*

Today we celebrate the African Environment Day. The theme of this year's observance, "Adapting to Climate Change for Livelihood Security in Africa" reminds us that the problem of Africa is today's global challenge. Climate change can no longer be seen as an environment matter, it is also a development issues. It is not a problem for the future, its effects are already seen and we know that the Africa region has a limited capacity to manage the catastrophic consequences of climate change.

Let us not forget the ground on which we walk and the land that feeds us. We know African countries are at risk of being the most affected by climate changes. Loss of fertile topsoil and arable land leads to food insecurity, a real challenge in many African countries; water shortage is also threatening the sustainable livelihood of lower income groups, notably in the rural communities. The present cycle of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development should mobilize greater attention on investing in the fight against DLDD in order to render African countries and population able to cope with climate change patterns in terms of mitigation and adaptation.

The UNCCD places a strong focus in the Africa region. All African countries are Parties to the UNCCD and most of them are in the process of mainstreaming their National Action Programme s. In many African countries, combating desertification and promoting development are virtually one and the same due to the social and economic importance of natural resources and agriculture.

The UNCCD is in a unique position as the nexus between poverty reduction and ecosystem protection in the drylands. Implications of climate change, both mitigation and adaptation, cannot be delivered without the context of the Convention.

The UNCCD has recognized the looming threat. It has recently adopted its Ten-year strategic plan to make the Convention a systemic and worldwide response to global environmental issues affecting land and its ecosystems. The Strategy highlights the importance of forging a global coalition to combat desertification, land degradation and drought in the present context of climate change. Its objectives include actions to improve both the living conditions of affected populations and the conditions of affected ecosystems; to generate global benefits through effective implementation of the Convention, and to mobilize resources to support the implementation process through building effective partnerships between national and international actors.

I salute the African Union and NEPAD on their continuous effort to combat against these serious hazards. The Secretariat of the Convention contributed substantively to the formulation of the NEPAD environmental action plan and we pledge, within the limit of our mandate, to continue supporting African countries, particularly towards the development of the 39 out of 68 selected projects directly related to land degradation and desertification.

Finally, I seize the opportunity of the 2008 African Environment Day to express my gratitude to all African leaders and partners for the various efforts being undertaken to address land degradation and desertification in the region.