

Opening Remarks to UNCCD 1st Scientific Conference

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William D. Dar

**Director General, ICRISAT ; Chair, UNCCD Committee on Science and Technology (CST) 8; and
Chair, Scientific Conference**

Dear Friends,

It is an honour with a deep sense of humility to discharge this responsibility of chairing the UNCCD 1st Scientific Conference under the Ninth Session of CST.

Our journey from CST8 in Madrid to CST9 here in this beautiful city of Buenos Aires, has been a busy and fruitful one. We have handled many fundamental issues of reform called for by the 10-Year Strategy of UNCCD. We were asked to reshape our processes and our programme of work, and we have done so. We have launched a Scientific Conference format, and we have adopted a very inclusive, consultative and evidence-based approach. We must continue to carry these reforms forward.

This is a path breaking scientific conference of UNCCD, one that pledges to make room for substantive scientific discussions on combating desertification, land degradation and drought. We should recall the reasons why this new path is so important. The world is facing a 'perfect storm', with a number of huge problems

converging around land issues. At the center of this storm are the poor, who depend on the land for survival – yet, they are unable to fight off the massive storm clouds that are building.

Already beset by poverty and hunger, the World Bank estimates that developing countries will bear 80% of the environmental costs to mitigate climate change. Yet, climate change threatens ever harsher temperatures, droughts and storms, all of which can send the poor right back to the bottom of the development ladder. Increasing population pressure and poverty will just increase the intensity of this perfect storm, and the suffering that it causes.

Our whole UNCCD community recognizes that we need science to better understand this storm, and to devise solutions that work for the poor. We need options for people that reduce their vulnerability and increase their resiliency. We need options for the land that prevent irreversible losses of precious natural resources like soil, biodiversity and water. We need both policy and technical options – the two go hand-in-hand. Again, the key message is that: “People and Land Matter”

Let us have your positive engagement for a rich scientific discussion in our First Scientific Conference. Many eyes are watching us to see if we are brave enough

to walk down this new path. If we hesitate or turn back, they may walk away from us. But if we are bold and continue forward, we will find many new friends along the way. And together we will find ways to weather the perfect storm.

Thank you.