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## NEWS RELEASE

### **Disastrous Sand and Dust Storms Force Global Partnership**

**Buenos Aires, 24 September 2009.** Experts from the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) have called for an immediate global response to the increasing number of sand and dust storms. Talks during the ninth session of the Conference of Parties (COP 9) of the UNCCD in Buenos Aires, Argentina, took account of the 4<sup>th</sup> Assessment Report of the Inter-government Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warning that there will be an increased frequency of drought, especially in the dryland regions of the world.

Suspended particles in the atmosphere can affect global warming and have many deadly impacts on society. A high probability that meningitis in Africa and Valley Fever in the Americas is associated with sand and dust weather was reported. Meningitis in the sub-Saharan belt is one of the most feared epidemic diseases in Africa with high fatality rates and brain damage being common.

“Policy makers need to know the source of disease outbreaks, whether they are due to airborne or human transport, and to take actions to minimize risk to health and agriculture,” WMO’s Robert Stefanski said. “Present capabilities to provide effective climate services fall far short of the needs in developing countries and must be improved.” As much as 330,000 tons of sand fell on Beijing in a single night during spring conditions in 2006.

WMO is establishing a Sand and Dust Storm Warning Advisory and Assessment System to help countries receive early warnings on devastating sand and dust storms around the world.

A key expert on sand and dust storms, Yang Youlin of the UNCCD office in Bangkok, called for an enhanced ability of countries to deliver timely and quality forecasts of sand and dust storms. “Land degradation and sand encroachment in China has expanded to 3,436 square kilometers per year during the late 1990s and early 2000s.”

In China alone, dust and sand storms originate from a total area of about 1 million sq. km. Rainfall patterns combined with efforts to control land degradation in Northern China, such as the ‘Grain for Green Project’, have helped to minimise sand and dust events in recent years.

In North America, the annual on-farm cost of wind erosion in the Prairie Provinces of Canada is estimated at USD \$250 million. “Long-term drought in Australia and its recent sand and dust storms highlight the risk to the world,” said Stefanski.

Scientists meeting in Buenos Aires from 22-24 September during the UNCCD's COP 9 are also discussing over-grazing, over-cultivation and destruction of soil that accelerates wind erosion in dryland regions.

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**About the UNCCD**

Developed as a result of the Rio Summit, the UNCCD is a unique instrument that has brought attention to land degradation in some of the most vulnerable ecosystems and affected populations in the world. Thirteen years after coming into force, the UNCCD benefits from the largest membership of the three Rio Conventions and is recognized as an instrument that can make an important contribution to the achievement of sustainable development and generate global benefits.