

Statement by Mr. Luc Gnacadja
Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification on the occasion
UNCCD Land Day 6 June 2009

(Check against delivery)

Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies & Gentlemen

It gives me a great pleasure to welcome you all at this first “Land Day”. To my dear colleague & friend Yvo de Boer I would like to express my deep appreciation, thank you for having managed to attend the opening session despite of your heavily loaded agenda during this Bonn Climate change talks.

We have mobilized very special and high profile keynote speaker (thank you professor Jeffrey Sachs for being remotely part of this gathering) moderators and panellists, and I’m grateful to you all for being here on a Saturday, after a gruelling week Talks on the prospects of the new climate regime the World is calling for.

I don’t intend to be substantive precisely because our panellists will be comprehensively substantive.

But allow me to recall the purpose of the Land Day

The Land Day is indeed a good example of partnership that the Parties to the UNCCD have called for when they laid the UNCCD Ten-year Strategy, and I would like to thank our partners for setting a good example.

Building on the linkages between climate change and desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD), the “Land Day” is proposed by the UNCCD secretariat and its partners as a one-day parallel event in the margin of Climate Change Talks, with the aim of fostering interactions with the Climate Change negotiators on the imperative necessity to bridge and seal the gaps in land-based mitigation and adaptation measures.

This should normally not be a challenge, given that climate change and DLDD are twin-threats to sustainability of life on earth, but this scientific evidence is not yet well acknowledged as such.

We know that carbon in the atmosphere is a pollutant, while organic carbon in soils is a commodity and land degradation is essentially symptomatic of soil carbon loss. So business should be easy to jump start here.



In establishing the policy frameworks, the right incentives as well as the relevant trade off mechanisms that will benefit to all the stakeholders should be at the core of the talks on how to build a new and sound climate change regime. But amazingly we are far from being there.

Poor soils result in poor people and end up in the fall of civilizations. History tells us about the rise and the fall of the ancient Mesopotamia, the Mayans in Mesoamerica and the great Zimbabwe in southern Africa. But in our era, endemic soil degradation is aggravated by the climate crisis we have created over the last centuries.

The world's soil holds more organic carbon than that the one that is held by the atmosphere as CO₂ and vegetation combined, yet the role of the soil in capturing and storing carbon dioxide is often one missing information layer when taking into consideration the importance of the land in mitigating climate change.

Extraordinary demands are being made on our agricultural systems to produce more food, more fiber and more energy. This, combined with increasingly severe and long drought periods around the globe, changing rainfall patterns, storms and floods, much of our land has been further degraded, leaving it far from being saturated with carbon. Thus its potential to sequester carbon is very high.

The land has an unparalleled capacity to hold carbon and to act as a sink for greenhouse gases making it imperative to focus on a set of changes that enhance rehabilitation, protection and sustainable management of degraded lands on the planet. A number of opportunities and pathways to change exist that should be considered in the climate change negotiation process.

The global carbon trade mechanisms and markets must change, be made accessible and provide incentives to farmers and others land managers.

The approach of soil organic carbon restoration constitutes a significant adaptation tool to climate change, in addition to sequestering carbon. It is a win-win-win ground that allows us to bring together the issues of climate change, desertification and biodiversity.

It will also have the potential to bring more equity and justice in the climate regime by giving incentives to the developing countries to pro-actively join the climate agenda.

It can be an avenue to provide incentives to the poorest among the poor of this world living in the rural areas and particularly in the drylands to better invest in the sustainable management of their land, those whose carbon print is close to zero but who are already heavily affected by climate change, some of them having reached the limits of adaptation and having being forced to migrate.

There is a fervent need to include in the negotiation agenda of UNFCCC practical approaches to land-based mitigation and other adaptation initiatives. The carbon trade could provide an incentive to cease further deforestation. Reforestation and recuperation of degraded land for fuel and food crops would gain magnitude.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

People go hungry when they lose their productive lands. When rains stop and droughts continue, they lose means for living and end up abandoning their homeland.



This is how desertification affects 1.2 billion people today.

Soils potentials are common goods and the most degraded soils hold the greatest potential for remediation. Soil potentials for climate change adaptation & mitigation are unparalleled but still remained untapped

The convergence of food, fuel, finance and economic crises against the backdrop of climate change is an unprecedented opportunity for action to reshape the development agenda that we must not waste

The major challenge to be considered should be how to reconcile the competing needs associated with the security of food, water and energy while reversing environmental degradation and fighting climate change?

Let the soil be the medium for change

So, let's seal the deal.