



## **Drought and Desertification Day**

**Madrid, Friday, 17 June | 11:15**

### **Opening remarks by Mr. Alain Richard Donwahi, COP15 President**

Your Excellency President Sánchez,

Your Excellency Vice President Ribera,

Your Excellency Minister XXX

Mr. Sinkevicius, European Commissioner for the Environment, Oceans and Fisheries

Mr. Ibrahim Thiaw, Executive Secretary of the UNCCD,

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

Muchas gracias Madrid, Bella Madrid,

I am pleased to be with you today in this beautiful and welcoming city of Madrid to celebrate the “World Desertification and Drought Day”

As a former Minister of Water and Forests, the challenges of desertification and drought are close to my heart.

I am aware of the responsibility that is ours in the face of climate change, but also in the face of history, in the face of these hundreds of millions of individuals whose living conditions are deteriorating due to drought, desertification and soil degradation.



It is not by chance that in most countries, years of drought are listed as years of economic downturn. Most countries have their economies essentially dependent on the Primary Sector. This means they depend on a thin layer of soil and a few millimetres of rain. When the rain does not come on time and in quantity, it causes major disruptions.

When this is coupled with soil that is degraded, the crisis can turn into a disaster.

This is why I am happy that the "Abidjan Legacy Program" was announced by President Ouattara at the Heads of State Summit during the 15th Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD last May in Abidjan, in order to integrate sustainable soil management and restoration into its development strategies.

The threat caused by droughts unites us. As today's theme reminds us "Rising up from Drought Together", is an important start.

Let us not forget that almost 160 million children are exposed to severe and prolonged droughts. By 2040, it is estimated that one in four children will live in areas with extreme water scarcity.

Additionally, in the E.U. and UK, annual drought losses are currently estimated at around €9 billion and projected to reach over €65 billion without significant climate action.

As my brother Ibrahim Thiaw mentioned, no country is immune to drought. Rich or poor. Admittedly, the effects of drought severely hit the poorest countries. But several better-off countries are beginning to feel the effects of the drought, notably Australia, the United States and Spain, which is hosting us today.

To succeed, we must implement two priorities, the political dynamics linked to the leaders of the planet and the dynamics of the synergies that must exist between the public policies that each State conducts and international cooperation. Even more, to fight drought, we need to change the paradigm and opt for "proactive, risk-based" approaches instead of "reactive, crisis-based" approaches.



To this end, I welcome the creation of the “Intergovernmental Working Group on Drought for 2022-2024”, decided at COP15 in Abidjan, for a more proactive drought management.

As President of COP15, I urge all Parties, particularly Spain and other EU Parties, to support the work of the Intergovernmental Working Group so as to achieve concrete and policy-relevant results at the next Conference of the Parties due for 2024 in Saudi Arabia.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

Madrid offers us the opportunity to amplify the new impetus that we want to give to COP15. We must make history with resolute action for the implementation of the objectives of the Rio conventions.

The people are watching us, the youth challenges us, History awaits us.

Viva Madrid y el mundo

Thank you very much!

**Alain-Richard Donwahi**  
**COP15 President**