

Press Release

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Desertification and Drought Day event in Madrid

Friday, 17 June 2022, 11:00-14:00 hrs (CEST) /09:00-12:00 (GMT/UTC)

Webcast Link: <https://bit.ly/3Nw1Wgt>

Streaming through Twitter and Facebook: @unccd

No Droughtland: Global Leaders Call for Urgent Action to Boost Drought Resilience

- *Desertification and Drought Day marked in Spain and around the world*
- *Three out of four people may be affected by drought by 2050*
- *Global campaign urges action now to ensure no country becomes Droughtland*
- *Countries and communities around the world pioneer solutions to boost drought resilience*

Bonn/Madrid, 17 June 2022 – In the face of growing impacts of drought exacerbated by land degradation and climate change, countries and communities must take action now to build drought resilience, global leaders urged today at a high-level event to mark Desertification and Drought Day in Madrid, Spain.

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said: “Droughts in all regions are getting more frequent and fierce. The well-being of hundreds of millions of people is being compromised by increasing sandstorms, wildfires, crop failures, displacement and conflict. Climate change bears much responsibility, but so does how we manage our land. Taking care of our land and its biodiversity can help address the climate crisis and assist in reaching all our Sustainable Development Goals. Let us act now to drought-proof our future.”

Drought resilience is the focus of this year’s global observance hosted by Spain and led by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), with commemorative events taking place around the world.

Ibrahim Thiaw, UNCCD Executive Secretary, said: “No nation—rich or poor—is immune to drought, and all countries can take steps to avoid the devastating impacts of droughts on people’s lives and livelihoods. Although we have made some progress, it is not enough. Drought is a natural hazard, but it does not have to be a disaster. We are calling on all countries to make this year’s global observance a pivotal moment where we commit to working together to restore our lands, protect natural resources and boost communities’ resilience to drought to ensure no country becomes Droughtland.”

Teresa Ribera, Vice-President of the Government of Spain, said:

“Spain is one of the most vulnerable European countries to desertification. Almost three quarters of its territory are drylands susceptible to be affected by this phenomenon, 20% of which are already considered degraded. The fact that Spain has had to live with droughts and their consequences for decades has taught us the need to integrate drought into hydrological planning and water resource management, addressing it in advance and avoiding, as far as possible, emergency actions when severe situations have already been reached.”



Droughts are hitting harder

According to the latest [UNCCD report](#), droughts are up 29% since 2000, with 55 million people affected every year. By 2050, droughts may affect an estimated three out of every four people around the world.

In the Horn of Africa, at least 26 million people are facing food shortages following four consecutive poor rainfall seasons. Elsewhere, communities from Chile to the United States, from Mexico to Morocco, from China to Spain are also in the grips of severe—and often unprecedented—drought.

Patricia Kombo, Founder of PaTree Initiative and UNCCD Land Hero from Kenya, said: “Drought was declared a national disaster last October. And I have witnessed how it is affecting people in Turkana [County in Kenya] while we were providing emergency food relief there. I realized that droughts do not only affect food systems, but they fuel poverty, conflicts and migration... because in one village you could only find like 10 households and they were telling us the youthful generation had migrated...it’s a cross-cutting issue.”

A drought in Southern Africa five years ago put 20 million people on the verge of starvation. This year Chile marked a record-breaking 13th year of drought. A prolonged drought in the United States that started in 2000 is the country’s driest period in over 1,200 years. Monterrey, the third largest city of Mexico, is rationing water due to drought.

“Desertification and drought are the primary causes of migration and inter-community conflict. It is not by chance that in most countries, years of drought are listed as years of economic downturn... We must deal with drought, using every tool we can. Existing tools and resources may not be enough. But they can get us far, if we make a better use of the existing tools: Early Warning- Preparedness-Response...the recently held COP discussions in Abidjan have reinforced the momentum that has been building on the need to tackle, urgently, desertification, land degradation and drought,” said **Alain Richard Donwahi, UNCCD COP15 President.**

Half of the world’s population is expected to face severe water scarcity in the next eight years. As many as 700 million people (about 10% of the world’s population) are at risk of being displaced during that period, according to UNCCD’s Drought in Numbers report.

Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, President, Association for Indigenous Women and Peoples of Chad, said: “In Chad, the desert is advancing four kilometers every year. That means, in a few decades, the capital N’Djamena will be in the desert. And we are facing extreme weather events from drought around all the Sahel region and all over Africa. The rainy seasons are not coming anymore and this worsens the drought in our communities. We need urgent action to fight desertification, to fight this drought, to invest in our communities, to restore our ecosystem in order to give us good food production.”

Examples of resilience in the face of drought

A recent review of [drought risk mitigation measures](#) by UNCCD and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) showcases examples from around the world of how countries and communities can boost drought resilience through better early warning systems, greater interagency cooperation, and a mix of traditional knowledge and innovative approaches.

In **Brazil, Ethiopia and Tunisia**, a combination of water harvesting and sustainable land management practices are used to reduce the impact of drought among vulnerable populations.



There are signs of progress even in the most vulnerable regions. The drought risk system in Africa's **Sahel** is regional in scope. Originally set up 50 years ago, it brings together the entire range of stakeholders, from producer associations to decision-makers, who benefit from scientific and technological capabilities provided by regional organizations.

India has taken an even more comprehensive approach that includes drought management as part of the national disaster management plan and involves various institutions at national, state and local levels. It is built around early action that begins with the management of the country's water system, including rainwater, rivers and groundwater.

In **Central America**'s Corredor Seco, the dry corridor stretching across Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, as well as areas of Costa Rica and Panama, community contingency funds are used to support drought-hit farmers without access to formal financing and insurance systems. Over 60% of the population depends on the production of staple grains for their livelihoods, and in three out of five harvest cycles, small farmers suffer significant losses.

The **United States** has recently announced that drought will become a strategic domestic and foreign policy priority. The country has some of the most sophisticated and advanced drought-monitoring and response mechanisms, which could benefit and fast-track the development of collaborative action at the global level.

“The good news is, real solutions exist,” *Thiaw said*. “Countries should have access to robust and effective early warning and monitoring systems. Countries, especially in drought-prone areas, should plan for solid drought preparedness and act now! Communities, especially the most vulnerable ones, should have access to adequate insurance schemes to protect their lives and livelihoods. By restoring land back to health, we can protect our climate and water resources, boost drought resilience and sustain life on this planet,” he added.

Drought resilience was a top agenda item at the 15th Session of the UNCCD Conference of the Parties (COP15) held in Côte d'Ivoire in May. Countries agreed to establish an Intergovernmental Working Group for 2022-2024 to evaluate all options for the Convention to support a shift from reactive to proactive drought management. The Group's findings and recommendations will be presented at the UNCCD COP16 to be held in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 2024.

Highlights of activities in Spain and around the world

In Spain, the host of this year's global observance, a high-level event at the Reina Sofia Museum brought together renown scientists, issue experts, youth representatives and high-level policymakers from Spain and around the world to discuss:

- the role of science based on the drought risks identified for different climate change scenarios
- success stories of drought mitigation and adaptation in Spain and other countries.
- viable drought policies and their components

As part of the global Droughtland campaign, an [information booth](#) was set up in the centre of Madrid to raise public awareness on the impacts of drought. In addition, an event at Casa Arabe organized by Fundación Biodiversidad in cooperation with Basque Culinary Centre brought together top chefs and experts to discuss the challenges of food production in drought-prone areas.



Other [countries](#) around the world are marking this year's Day to bring public attention to the threats from and solutions to drought.

They include Chad, Kenya, Mali and Tunisia from Africa. China, Iran, United Arab Emirates and Uzbekistan from Asia. Colombia and Mexico in the Latin America and the Caribbean region. Italy, Portugal and Spain in the Northern Mediterranean region. The Russian Federation in Central and Eastern Europe.

But anyone can take action. NGOs [CARI and Coordination Sud](#) in France and Shine Africa Foundation in Uganda are among those organizing events this year.

Notes to editors

Journalists wishing to cover the event in Madrid, Spain need to be registered, and should email: bzn-prensa@miteco.es and copy wwischnewski@unccd.int. A copy of your valid press card and passport will be required to pick your access card.

Download various materials here (<https://bit.ly/3xd4IjC>), including:

- b-roll and images on the drought in Eastern Africa (<https://bit.ly/3Pw6ULm>). Credit UNCCD
- video messages and testimonials from around the world (<https://bit.ly/3zJVFcY>)
- Videos and assets from the [Droughtland campaign](#) (<https://bit.ly/3zvCfsb>) Credit UNCCD
- Images of the event in Spain will be uploaded here (<https://bit.ly/3xBtCuI>).

For information about Desertification and Drought Day events in Spain and around the world, contact Kenya Scanlon, Chief of Communications, UNCCD: xscanlon@unccd.int

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About Desertification and Drought Day

Officially declared by the UN General Assembly in 1997 (Resolution A/RES/49/115), the annual Desertification and Drought Day has three objectives. First, to promote public awareness about desertification and drought. Second, to let people know that desertification and drought can be effectively tackled, that solutions are possible, and that key tools to this aim lay in strengthened community participation and cooperation at all levels. Lastly, to strengthen implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa.

For information about Desertification and Drought Day visit:
<https://www.unccd.int/2022-desertification-and-drought-day>

About Droughtland

Do you know where Droughtland is? Are you interested in a visa to live there? Think twice because Droughtland is... special. In the lead up to the 2022 Desertification and Drought Day, UNCCD launched Droughtland, a public awareness campaign featuring a fictional drought-stricken nation, to



showcase solutions and rally global action to boost drought resilience. Learn more about the campaign: droughtland.com Social Media: @TourDroughtland

About UNCCD

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is the global vision and voice for land. We unite governments, scientists, policymakers, private sector and communities around a shared vision and global action to restore and manage the world's land for the sustainability of humanity and the planet. Much more than an international treaty signed by 197 parties, UNCCD is a multilateral commitment to mitigating today's impacts of land degradation and advancing tomorrow's land stewardship in order to provide food, water, shelter and economic opportunity to all people in an equitable and inclusive manner.

Quotes

Below is a selection of video messages and quotes for media use: <https://bit.ly/3zJVFcY>

Abdulla Shahid, President of the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly

“...we must recognize that our actions, our ways of living have dire consequences. In just over a century, droughts have impacted at least 2.7 billion people globally and caused 11.7 million deaths. Forecasts estimate that by 2050, droughts may affect over ¾ of the world's population. All of this while we continue to devastate the very land we depend upon... Together, we can turn this trend around. Together, we can restore the productivity of over 2 billion hectares of degraded land and improve the livelihoods of over 1.3 billion people around the world... Let us take the commitments made during UNCCD COP15 and renew our commitment to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality by 2030.”

Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

“We must realize that we are pushing the boundaries of this planet. Drought is but one consequence of this constant and unrelenting pressure. We have statistics to show that droughts are increasing in frequency and severity. But numbers cannot measure the misery of thirst, the fear of a failed crop or waiting for rain clouds to appear on the horizon — but waiting in vain. We need unified, concerted and ambitious action. Namely, we need nations to come up with stronger national climate action plans and ensure they are tabled annually.”

Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity

“The links between drought and human activities are strong and go both ways, each having an impact on the other. The desiccation of the Aral Sea is a tragic example where unsustainable water consumption has led to irreversible loss of the inland water ecosystem and its biodiversity, increased drought and dust storms. Protecting biodiversity can drought-proof nature and societies. Nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches are cost-effective, long-lasting and bring multiple benefits for people and nature.”

Dongyu Qu, Director General, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

“The impact of droughts has seriously affected all agrifood systems. Yet, agrifood systems can provide a solution to climate change, land degradation and water scarcity. We must transform our



agrifood system to be more efficient, more inclusive, more resilient, and more sustainable. FAO is actively supporting Members to address water scarcity at the national, regional, and international level.”

Monica Medina, Assistant Secretary of State, United States of America

“Individuals, communities and governments must act to combat desertification and drought around the world and build long-term resilience... We also need to shift planning horizons. These issues will be with us for the long run and we need to get ahead of the curve. We must all think long-term and find innovative ways to reduce drought instead of just responding to the devastating impacts caused by drought. We need to act before damage is done. That’s why we encourage governments around the world to develop their own land planning processes and provide funding for climate-smart agricultural policies before drought hits. Using data to improve drought forecasting is a key pillar of our approach under the recently released White House action plan on global water security.”

Juan Carlos Jintiach, Indigenous leader from Ecuador

“Drought and desertification are very important issues that we Indigenous Peoples must have on our agenda. They are affecting the forests, our food, our living conditions—not only in the Amazon region but in the Andean region that connects the rivers and the water sources. We are Indigenous Peoples of the land, and we see water as part of a being, water as part of our nature and part of Mother Earth.”