

On June 17th The Ministry of Environmental Protection of the Republic of Serbia, as the authority responsible for the implementation of the UNCCD organised an event this year as well, with the aim of raising public awareness on the causes and consequences of negligent and irresponsible attitude towards the land. The gathering was held in Novi Sad, with the participation of the representatives of the diplomatic corps, academic and scientific community, public institutions, NGOs and media. It was an opportunity to present the activities realized by the Ministry on combating desertification and drought at the national level and in an international context, as presented by UNCCD NFP.

As a country committed to international initiatives to protect the environment, nature and its resources, Serbia continues to implement activities in this field. Within the LDN TSP the Ministry submitted to the UNCCD Secretariat in February 2020 the “Report on the applied methodology and identification of targets to achieve land degradation neutrality in the Republic of Serbia”, which defines national voluntary LDN targets and associated measures for the Republic of Serbia for achieving the Land Degradation Neutrality. Also, within the Drought Initiative, the Ministry has submitted to the UNCCD Secretariat the document “Drought Initiative - Republic of Serbia, Recommendations for the development of a National Drought Plan”, in April 2020. For the Ministry of Environmental Protection this document will serve as recommendations and guidelines for further development of national drought related policies and measures, and could be seen as an initial step of a national long-term wide action and a framework for integral actions to reduce the impacts of drought on society and nature and increase general preparedness, leading to minimized losses and damages. Hence, this document is not adopted by the Government of the Republic of Serbia as such. As well, The Ministry has started drafting a National Action Program for Combating Desertification and Land Degradation and Mitigating the Effects of Drought and has formed a multi-sectoral Working Group made of representatives of all relevant state bodies and organizations, scientific institutions and civil society organizations, which for the drafting of the document will be supported by the expert team. Future National Action Program will be in compliance with The UNCCD 2018-2030 Strategic Framework and complemented with the results of the LDN process, and after consultations with stakeholders will be sent to the Government for adoption.

On the occasion it was particularly noted that healthy soil, land, clean water and air are an indispensable condition for a healthy environment, and a movie by the Tired Earth Group on the process and impact of desertification was presented, as well as the movie of the Ministry dedicated to the widespread problem of stubble burning in Serbia, which leads to land degradation and threatening biodiversity, as part of the continuous campaign carried out by the Ministry. Also, Ministry issued two public releases on that matter and the topic drew public attention and the event was widely published in the most respectable media with more than 30 publications.

The Ministry joins the call of the United Nations to contribute to the land conservation and restoration, biodiversity conservation and mitigation of the consequences of climate change through our daily personal choices, by changing our dietary and clothing habits, and living in harmony with nature. The degradation of fertile land as the most important natural resource which leads to the biodiversity loss is an urgent issue that society must

address immediately and with full responsibility, said Minister of Environmental Protection, Mr. Goran Trivan. Desertification is one of the most destructive processes on the planet, adding that the degradation processes that run parallel with the development of civilization, continuously reduce the economic and biological productivity of the land. We must use the land reasonably and protect it as best as we can, because the quality of food, air, drinking water and groundwater, biodiversity depend on it, as well as our entire lives. Afforestation is the best way to conserve the land and prevent its devastation, and at the same time preserve the air, biodiversity, and human life, adding that the Ministry will continue with afforestation actions. We are a small country, but the world has recognized our commitment and initiative over the past three years for a healthy environment and nature protection, and I would like it to stay that way. Land is a limited resource on our planet, and this planet is our only home, and it is high time to start using it rationally and adding that as it stands today, our attitude toward the planet is robbing the coming generations of their future, which we have no right to do. The transition can and must assume a more humane look, and we should work on building a more humane society, which means a more humane attitude towards people, flora and fauna and our own environment, Minister concluded.