



**Keynote Speech
Delivered by**

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**United Nations Convention to Combat
Desertification**

**On the Occasion of
2018 Caux Dialogue on Land and Security**

**“Landscapes of Peace: using land
restoration for conflict resolution”**

Caux, Switzerland

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16:45-18:45**

Dear Colleagues and Friends,



It is a great pleasure to be here to represent UNCCD at this Caux Dialogue on Land and Security. It is my second visit to Caux....hopefully many more to come!!

It is heartening to see so many familiar faces around.....thank you for your commitment and continues support to the land agenda, which is at the core of the world's food, poverty, migration, water, climate, biodiversity and security crises, and lies at the root of many conflicts. We need a new paradigm shift – a new way of coherent and interdisciplinary thinking about landscapes that would enable us to harness new opportunities and support ecosystem restoration at the global scale. We need to closely look at the potential of transforming restoration finance and securing partnerships to achieve that.

I think we all share a belief that if we care for the land, the land will in turn care for us...feed us, shelter us and inspire us. And underpin our collective wellbeing. With well-being understood in far more than just economic terms but also in terms of social and ecological security!

So today, I would like to explore whether land restoration could also foster confidence building and underpin our collective security and peace?

Colleagues and Friends,



Otto Von Bismarck, renowned German statesman, said *“A statesman cannot create anything himself. He must wait and listen until he hears the steps of God sounding through events; then leap up and grasp the hem of his garment.”*

We have known for a long time, land degradation destabilizes lives and livelihoods. Land degradation undermines the well-being of two fifths of humanity - some 3.2 billion people. It is driving species extinction and intensifying climate change. It is also a major contributor to mass human migration.

And land degradation is a root cause of increased competition and conflict over access to natural resources across many countries and regions. And it is set to get worse.

With a population racing towards 10 billion by 2050, we will need to increase food production by 70% and enhanced access to potable water by 50%. And we would need to create millions of more jobs in order to meet growing needs and aspirations of our youth.

Asia and Africa will be on the frontlines of this exploding demand - with ballooning populations. And a falling supply of productive land.

Resource scarcity, land degradation and sudden climatic changes may not cause conflicts on their own, but they certainly are “threat multipliers” to peace and security. An estimated 40% of intrastate conflicts are related to competing claims on land and natural resources.



In Africa for example, competition for access to land and resources has led to conflicts in several countries. Around Lake Chad basin, more than 2.3 million people still remain displaced. Around 4.5 million people are severely food insecure.

In Latin America and the Caribbean region, 36 million hectares of land got degraded between 2001 and 2012.

In South Asia, land degradation causes 10 billion USD in annual losses.

While in the middle-eastern region, two thirds of the countries have already surpassed their natural capacity to meet their food and water needs.

Colleagues and Friends,

Land is an important economic asset and source of livelihoods for up to 80 % of the population in several countries around the world!

But beyond the Malthusian theory, land is also closely linked to people's identity, history and culture.

But because it is so closely tied to identity, I would argue we can make the case that investing in land is a tool for conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Indeed peace and security lead to society building.



If we make the rehabilitation of the land a part of our culture and identity in the coming decades; I believe we can pool assets. I believe we will not just survive but thrive in a resource constrained world. We need not have only productive ecosystems but also functional ecosystems.

For that to happen, we would need the right institutions, policies and governance systems in place to manage land efficiently, equitably, and sustainably, and it is possible.

We can take models from other sectors. And increasingly apply them to the land restoration and natural world.

The European Coal and Steel Community, for example, was set up by 6 war ravaged European countries after World War II to pool their assets, regulate and plan their industrial production under a unified authority. It started the process of integration that led to the European Union.

The shared management of water, land, forests, wildlife and protected areas likewise in many countries and regions has great examples of eco-cooperation for peace building.

One of the most famous examples of environmental conservation as a way to mediate hostility and conflict between nations is the Cordillera Condor between Peru and Ecuador.

I was fortunate enough to be in Ecuador last month as part of the World Day to Combat Desertification celebrations.



In 1999, Ecuador established the El Cónдор Park. While Peru created an Ecological Protection Zone and the Santiago-Comaina Reserved Zone.

These peace parks were established as mechanisms for bilateral cooperation. They were used to promote the social, cultural and economic development of local communities in both countries.

In addition to helping to resolve a long-term territorial dispute between the two countries, the agreement initiated an important phase of bilateral diplomacy, cooperation and commercial relations in the post-conflict phase.

A number of other fantastic examples were explored in an LDN Forum held in Korea at the beginning of July.

In Africa, where 65% of all cropland is affected by land degradation, from Sudan to Rwanda there, the clear lesson was that where countries emerging from conflict have addressed land and water issues effectively - they have laid the foundation for a durable peace¹.

In the southern Caucasus countries of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, a people-centered approach focused on introducing LDN to youth has led to dialogue and joint efforts and cooperation across conflict divides.

¹Unruh and R. C. Williams (2013): Land: A foundation for peacebuilding In Land and postconflict peacebuilding, p.1.
https://environmentalpeacebuilding.org/assets/Documents/LibraryItem_000_Doc_148.pdf



In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the setting of LDN targets in a post-conflict environment has helped this tripartite nation move towards a common vision for land in the face a 75% decline in rural populations over the past two decades.

In the Great Pantanal, representing 150,000 km² of Paraguay, Bolivia and Brazil, the recognition by all three governments of the value of conservation not only for nature, but indigenous people has led to sustainable use and economic growth, simultaneously.

In the Korean peninsula, the idea of cooperation on land and forestry issues is now even being explored for North-South Korean peace building efforts.

The symbolic tree planted at the recent Panmunjom summit was hailed as the first step towards the rehabilitation of Korea – north and south. In a period of delicate discussions and difficult trade-offs, it is no-brainer.

Based on these experiences and ongoing discussions, we could imagine peacebuilding based on shared management and rehabilitation of resources taking off across Africa and Asia. I have no doubt it would facilitate cooperation between the countries involved – and deliver massive positive returns in terms of ecological capital.



And in a global system striving to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the target of Land Degradation Neutrality could have an important role to play in that regard.

LDN is already recognized as an accelerator....both for the achievement of the SDGs and for greater climate resilience. LDN also shares many features of successful peacebuilding approaches.

By applying an integrated land use planning principle - that can cross traditional boundaries – LDN can optimize sometimes difficult trade-offs. A good example in China in the past decades had evidenced the effectiveness of integrated land and water use planning and management in ecological security, economic efficiency and social stability for all stakeholders along the upper, middle and lower reaches of three inland rivers.

That is important because whether or not differences over degrading land - and a declining resource base - become a source of division and violent conflict - or an opportunity for positive change and growth - depends on how difficult trade-offs are understood and addressed.

LDN, in particular, emphasizes the importance of the human dimension – land-users, stakeholder groups, and institutions – in land use planning and development. As it is a participatory and inclusive process, it can be used to systematically address conflicts as they arise.

To date nearly 120 countries have committed to achieve LDN by 2030.



As countries identify hotspots of land degradation as part of the LDN target setting process; they are also seeing a clear correlation between degradation, migration and conflict.

And this is leading to systematic attempts, especially in Africa, to address issues of sustainability, stability and security head on.

The Three S Initiative in Africa is an attempt to manage the impacts of land degradation and climate change in vulnerable hotspot areas by conserving, sustainably managing and rehabilitating degraded land.

The 14 countries in the initiative so far have committed to rehabilitate 10 million hectares and create 2 million jobs for migrants and ex-combatants.

United Nations studies on the relationship between natural resources and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration have found that 50 percent of former combatants participating in reintegration programs chose agriculture (in some cases, the proportion was as high as 80 percent)² as their way back into their communities.

Unruh and R. C. Williams (2013): Land: A foundation for peacebuilding In Land and postconflict peacebuilding, p.2, https://environmentalpeacebuilding.org/assets/Documents/LibraryItem_000_Doc_148.pdf



Increasingly all the evidence suggests, the rehabilitation of degraded land – using an inclusive model that pools assets and brings them back to life - can first stabilize, then secure and ultimately transform society.

Finally, the stars are aligning.

To go back to Otto Von Bismarck.

The steps of God are sounding through events. It is our job to leap up and grasp the hem of his garment. Investing in land restoration would lead to peace and security. For that we would need to build and nurture partnerships – global, regional, national and at the community level as we need to address land restoration in a holistic manner

I look forward to debating and hearing your views on this issue over the next few days. There are no right answers, of course but having the dialogue together is crucial to our sustainable future that we want, and that is where significance and value addition of the Caux dialogue on land and security get recognized.

Thank you for your attention.