



## STATEMENT BY

**Hama Arba Diallo**  
**Executive Secretary**

**of the United Nations Convention to Combat  
Desertification**

*On the occasion of the World day to Combat Desertification  
and Drought*



*Osnabrück, 17 June 2002*



Excellency Mr. Hans-Jurgen Flip, Lord Mayor of the City of Osnabrück,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour and great pleasure for me to be here with you today, on the occasion of the World Day to Combat desertification.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the local Authorities and people of the City of Osnabrück for their warm welcome and all the arrangements made to facilitate our stay in this magnificent City, which is well known as a European place devoted to the promotion of Peace and Culture.

My deep appreciation goes to the organisers of this event for making it possible for us to meet here and celebrate such a unique Day in the UNCCD process.

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to read out the message delivered by the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, on the occasion of the world Day to Combat desertification, I quote:

"Desertification and drought pose a world-wide threat with serious economic, environmental and socio-political implications. Every year, an estimated \$42 billion in income and 6 million hectares of productive land are being lost because of desertification, land degradation and declining agricultural productivity, and 135 million people who depend primarily on land for their livelihood are at risk of being displaced.

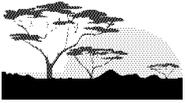


The fallout is felt on all continents. In Africa, over the next 20 years some 60 million people are expected to move from the Sahelian region to less hostile areas if the desertification of their land is not halted. In north-east Asia, dust and sandstorms have buried human settlements and forced schools and airports to shut down. In the Americas, dry spells and sandstorms have alarmed farmers and raised the spectre of another "Dust Bowl", reminiscent of the 1930s. And in southern Europe, lands once green and rich in vegetation are turning barren and brown.

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, adopted eight years ago today, integrates environmental and developmental concerns and thus is a key instrument not only in protecting ecosystems and resources, but also in alleviating poverty. However, a lack of predictable financial resources has hampered implementation.

I urge developed countries to follow through on the commitments they made both in adopting the Convention and at the "Earth Summit" 10 years ago in Rio de Janeiro -- including the provision of financial support through the Global Environment Facility (an alliance of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme, and the World Bank), which should serve as a financial mechanism of the Convention.

Desertification will be among the most important issues to be discussed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, which opens in less than three months. We need to find ways to halt land degradation, and to manage land more responsibly. We need to reverse the decline in agricultural productivity, so that food production keeps pace with



the number of mouths to feed. We need, in short, to fully implement the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification as a key element in the world's quest for sustainable development". Unquote.

Mr. Chairman,

Today we celebrate the world desertification day, eight years after the adoption of the UNCCD. This day marks a unique opportunity to sensitize the large public and decision makers on what the Convention is all about.

The UNCCD offers a unique framework for facing the double challenges for reducing poverty and desertification. It is a strategic instrument to integrate environmental and developmental policies through its development focus. It sets for action programmes to be elaborated at national, subregional and regional levels with the full participation of all involved actors.

The Convention acknowledges that the people of the drylands are the key to combating desertification and that eradication of poverty is a precondition for success.

The affected developing country Parties to the UNCCD, with the support of the international community, have put considerable effort into developing and implementing their national action programmes (NAPs). Today the NAPs are a reality in most of these affected countries and serve as a reference for their activities concerning the fight against desertification.

I am particularly pleased to note that Germany's involvement in support of the effort to implement the UNCCD in the affected developing countries is among the most important in



the world. Here in Germany, decision makers fully understand that so long as there are so many countries marginalized and not being able to securing their environment, increasing food security and creating new opportunities for alternative livelihoods, no one can claim leaving in a peaceful and wealthy country. The expression of solidarity to developing countries affected by desertification is the best guarantee to improve the leaving conditions and alleviate poverty of the poorest people in the world.

On behalf of the Secretariat of the Convention, I would like to salute the German authorities for their constant support and their role in achieving the objectives of the UNCCD.

We all have a specific role to play in bringing our contribution to the action to undertake either at local, national or global levels. Everybody bears a part of responsibility be it through the involvement of the relevant public structures, the private sector, the academic institutions, the Non Governmental Organizations, the bilateral and multilateral institutions or just simply as a citizen.

Let us therefore take the opportunity of this important Day for the UNCCD and reflect on how best we all can further the ideals of the founding fathers of the Convention so as to improve the livelihoods of some one billion people who struggle on a daily basis for their survival.

Thank you for your kind attention.