

WORD DAY TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION 2015 Global Observance Event in Milan, Italy

17 June 2015

Conference Centre, Milano Expo

The World Day to Combat Desertification (WDCD) is observed worldwide on 17 June every year. The theme of 2015 WDCD is attainment of food security for all through sustainable food systems. With the slogan, “No such thing as a free lunch - Invest in healthy soil”, the day highlights that eradicating hunger and poverty for all are closely tied to achieving Land Degradation Neutrality.

This year, the global observance event was held at the Expo Milan on Wednesday, 17 June. It is free and open to everyone. The event will feature the testimony of Mario Tozzi, renowned environmental journalist and TV personality, progress in creating a Great Green Wall in the Sahel by photograph Andrea Borgarelo, and performances by the Titi & Baribagass Band from Senegal.



Mr. Pohamba Shifeta, Minister of Environment and Tourism of **Namibia**, emphasized the importance of land for political stability and security. He reported on a recent study projecting the future impacts of climate change on Namibia, which may reduce pastureland from grassland to predominantly desert and arid shrubland. He highlighted Namibia’s achievement during its current tenure as the sitting President of the UNCCD Conference of the Parties. These include identifying the baseline and indicator framework that Namibia will use, going forward, to ensure the country avoids land degradation, and where unavoidable, an equal amount of the land degraded is restored, in the same ecosystem and within the same duration.

Ms. Monique Barbut, Executive Secretary of the **UN Convention to Combat Desertification**, explained the origins and use of the phrase “No such thing as a free lunch” in the USA. In relationship to the land, she explained that “without investing in healthy land, it is impossible for everyone to eat properly.... If one individual or groups gets something for nothing, someone else always ends up paying for it.”

Mr. Giampaolo Cantini, Director General of Development Cooperation at the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Italy**, highlighted a new awareness about peace and security. He drew attention to the link between environmental stress and conflict and underlined the importance of both land and marine food resources for our well-being. Italy, he noted, is not only supporting initiatives to combat land degradation in other affected countries, but it is also battling its effects relating to productivity, stability and forced population movements.

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Ms. Pia Bucella, Director, **Natural Capital, Directorate-General for the Environment** at the European Commission, stressed the importance of acting on land degradation in Europe, noting that a quarter of all European territory is affected by soil erosion. This not only threatens agricultural production, but demands food imports from other countries that leave behind a footprint of degrading land in other regions of the world. And with more than 70 billion tons of soil organic carbon stored in the soil, its erosion releases the stored carbon with negative impacts on climate change.

FAO Deputy Director-General, Ms. Maria Helena Semedo, highlighted the importance of soil to eradicate hunger, the role combatting land degradation plays in soil health and the contribution FAO is making in combatting land degradation, including in partnership with the UNCCD.

In her message to the participants, **Ms. Tarja Halonen, former President of Finland and UNCCD Drylands Ambassador**, stressed that Investing in the soil will promote food and nutrition security and also effectively support the eradication of poverty and combating climate change. She also underlined the importance of women's empowerment in the process, highlighting their role in providing sustainable land management solutions, producing food and technology development. More

Mr. Mario Tozzi, renowned Geologist and TV personality, spoke on a wide range of land use challenges facing Italy, including land sealing. He also drew attention to the impacts of human on the Earth, stressing that according to geologists, the Earth can only host 2 billion inhabitants, yet there are 7 billion of us. He argued that man has always behaved like a cowboy – using land and then moving – a strategy that works very well where there are unlimited land resources and no aggression. He said we are capable of reversing the situation, yet in his view, the problem can be addressed from a cultural point of view.

Ms. Paola Agostini, Global Lead for Landscapes and TerrAfrica Coordinator at the World Bank, used visual images – videos and photographs – taken in the Sahel region to show the situation in the Sahel and the change taking place through the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and Sahel Initiative. She drew attention to the new Resilient Landscapes Initiative to be launched at the 2015 Paris Climate Change that the World Bank/TerrAfrica will be using to recover degraded areas Conference. More..

During the event, Green Asia Network from the Republic of Korea and the Conservation Organization of the Afghan Mountain Areas in Afghanistan received their awards of US\$15,000 each as co-winners of the 2014 Land for Life Award.

During the World Day observances, the UNCCD secretariat announced the winners of the short writing contests and the 34 National Drylands Champions nominated by their countries. Titi & Baribagass band from Senegal (picture above), closed the session with a 90-minute live show. The band's lead artist, known by her stage name as Titi, sang about the fate of abused women and the world's poor children, highlighting the hunger and suffering they face. The event was covered globally on various media platforms. Below is some of the media coverage of the day.