

# WORD DAY TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION 2016

## Global Observance Event in Beijing

**17 June 2016**  
**Beijing, China**

The global observance event for World Day to Combat Desertification was held on 17 June 2016 in Beijing, China. It was hosted by the State Forestry Administration of China (SFA). Mr. Wang Yang, Vice Premier of China, presided over the opening ceremony of the event that was attended by nine Ministers/Vice Ministers from seven countries, and 400 participants. The opening session was held at the People's Congress Hall in Beijing, with keynote addresses and dialogue session by the high-level speakers. The observance also included an afternoon session at the Beijing International Hotel that covered thematic dialogues, the launch of the Joint Action Initiative, the launch of the report titled Unlocking the Sustainable Potential of Land Resources: Evaluation Systems, Strategies and Tools, prepared by the International Resource Panel of UNEP, and an award ceremony.

China Green Foundation also organized the CSO side event, "Action for Combating Desertification" where UNCCD Drylands Ambassador Ms. Liu Fangfei made a presentation about her ecological handkerchief campaign.

### OPENING

Mr. Zhang Jianlong, Minister of State Forestry Administration of China, stressed the importance of addressing implementation of SDG 15.3 in the spirit of international collaboration and coordination. Desertification degraded 10,000km<sup>2</sup> of land in China in the 1990s, he said, but the country's land rehabilitation efforts led to a steady land recovery over the last 10 years. "Despite the improvements, desertification and sandification remain serious threats in China," the minister said. "We aim at recovering 50% of currently degraded land by 2020."



Ms. Monique Barbut, Executive Secretary, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), said China has brought millions of people out of poverty through massive at scale land restoration efforts. She encouraged China to spearhead work in achieving land degradation neutrality and ensure it becomes humanity's defining achievement in the 21st Century.

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Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, in his video message pointed out that 1.3 billion hectares of land in Asia alone are affected by desertification. He stressed the importance of achieving land degradation neutrality and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Ms. Tarja Halonen, Former President of Finland and UNCCD Drylands Ambassador, said China's Belt and Road Joint Action Initiative can make an important contribution to our common goal of land restoration. She said sustainable land management fully meets the challenges we currently face such as water security and impacts of climate change. "UNCCD COP12 in Ankara was the first concrete step towards land degradation neutrality," she said. She also stressed the importance of participation, in particular of women as agents of change in sustainable land management.



Mr. Wang Yang, Vice Premier of China, said this year's slogan, "engage people," is an important concept for combatting desertification, noting that coping with desertification is a global challenge which needs joint efforts. The Belt and Road region is affected severely by desertification, he added, and said the Government of China is more than willing to collaborate with the countries in the region to combat desertification. For this, he proposed to rally together and reach consensus to construct ecological security, strengthen consultation and communication among the countries, share results and improve the capability of each country and improve the livelihood of people.

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### HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE ON ACHIEVING LAND DEGRADATION NEUTRALITY



Mr. Zhang Xinsheng, President, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), moderated the ministerial round-table on policy making. Mr. Zhang Yongli, Vice Minister, State Forestry Administration, talked about China's plan to control desertification, which includes the preservation of national desert parks, law reinforcement on sandification, overuse and exploitation, and comprehensive measures to continue building a natural forest in the Great Green Wall area.

Mr. Wassalké Boukari, Minister of Environment and sustainable development, Niger, commended China as a good example of sustainable agriculture and combatting desertification. He shared successful cases of land restoration in Niger. . He said 80% of Niger is desert, and 3 of the 7 countries surrounding Niger are suffering from terrorism. Lake Chad has serious sedimentation problems. Despite all these, Niger has succeeded in transforming armed fighters into farmers by exploring the potential of ground-water use to promote agriculture. The country has a firm determination to combat desertification.

Mr. Pohamba Shifeta, Minister of Environment and Tourism, Namibia, said his country, and more broadly Africa, is particularly concerned about the increasing severity and frequency of droughts. Thus, they recognize that the implementation of land degradation neutrality can play an important role in enhancing the preparedness of farmers and communities to mitigate the impacts from drought. He further stressed the need to strengthen the response measures to drought through effective Early Warning Systems and the establishment of insurance schemes to compensate for loss of livestock and crop failures. He said Namibia will host the Africa Drought Conference from 15-19 August 2016.

Mr Sedat Kadioglu, Deputy Undersecretary, Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs, Turkey, called for strong political will and determination to set goals and targets to combat desertification and land degradation. Turkey has been supporting other countries within the

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scope of its bilateral and multilateral relations, in line with the Ankara Initiative, which was adopted at the UNCCD COP12 last year. Also under this Initiative, Turkey organized international training on LDN target setting from 30 May to 5 June.

#### HIGH-LEVEL ROUND-TABLE ON IMPLEMENTATION



Environmental, Policy Climate Change and Sustainable Development, Argentina, said 70% of the country's food production comes from the drylands, 80% of which is suffering from desertification and water shortage. He stressed the need for voluntary LDN target setting through collaboration and efficient coordination. Argentina will host the Latin America and Caribbean Region meeting on LDN target setting.

Mr. Tsegmid Tsengel, State Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Green Development and Tourism, Mongolia, said the Government of Mongolia fully supports SDG 15.3 and believes that China's Belt and Road Joint Action Initiative will contribute a lot in this regard. He said 90% of the land in Mongolia is vulnerable to desertification and land degradation. Therefore, the Government is actively taking measures to combat desertification, such as capacity building, funds allocation, and public involvement and increasing cooperation.

Mr. Kim Yongha, Deputy Minister, Korea Forest Service, Republic of Korea, said the Belt and Road Joint Action Initiative will play a significant role to combat desertification and land degradation in the extensive area including the Middle East and Central Asia. From the country's own experience, he suggested that the Joint Action Initiative consider how to motivate the participation of local residents' and secure sufficient funds for the implementation by identifying the priorities. He added that the Republic of Korea supported LDN pilot projects in 14 countries.

Ms. Agi Veres, Acting Resident Representative and Country Director in China, United Nations Development Programme, presented UNDP's perspective on land degradation neutrality. She said the Belt and Road Joint Action Initiative has the vision of shared prosperity, partnership

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and shared economic growth, which will make an excellent platform for the region. She said UNDP will pay close attention to the Initiative and is supporting the pilot projects on LDN target setting at 3 levels – firstly, policy, capacity and advocacy to ensure national ownership; secondly, practical support on evidence-based local approaches; and thirdly, accessing finance for restoring land.

Mr. Zhang Shigang, Country Coordinator for China, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), said desertification is an international challenge, which UNEP regards as one of the key issues noting that: in 2016, UNEP issued the global desert outlook; one of UNEP's International Research Panels focuses on land and soil; and 165 countries at the World Environmental Summit made the commitment to a green economy, of which 49 have already mapped out their national strategy. He added that UNEP co-organized Kubuqi International Desert Forum, supports the scientific assessments in Kubuqi desert supported by Elion; and looks forward to more collaboration under the Belt and Road Joint Action Initiative.

#### **LAUNCH: THE BELT AND ROAD JOINT ACTION INITIATIVE**



Launching the initiative, Ms. Pan Yingzhen, UNCCD National Focal Point of China and Director General of SFA National Bureau to Combat Desertification, presented its framework, actions and principles. Then, Minister Zhang, President Halonen and Ms Barbut together lit the symbol of the globe.

#### **THEMATIC DIALOGUE 1: IMPACT OF TECHNICAL INNOVATION ON POLICY MAKING**

The Dialogue aimed at sharing innovative, scientific practices that support policies for achieving Land Degradation Neutrality. Ms. Yukie Hori, Spokesperson /Communication team leader, UNCCD, moderated the session. Mr. Wang Junhou, China Desertification Monitoring Center, spoke about the importance of monitoring and evaluating sustainable land management decision-making. Mr. Erdoğan Özevren, Ministry of Forest and Water Affairs of Turkey, shared Turkey's experience in controlling land degradation and water resource management. Ms. Zhang Wei, President of Xishi Ecological Science and Technology Company, presented a private

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sector effort for sustainable land management by introducing her company's work to rehabilitate a mining field and heavy metal contaminated soil solution. Mr. Qin Shengyi, President, Rechsand Science and Technology Group, and Mr. Xing Guoliang, President, Inner Mongolia Yuhangren High Technology Company, also represented private sector initiatives. Mr. Qin introduced his company's innovative use of desert sand for afforestation and water management. Mr. Xing talked about maximizing the cultivation of the desert plant seabuckthorn for consumer products, while managing it sustainably. Mr. Mohamed Wagih, Research and Innovation Advisor, SEKEM/Heliopolis University, representing an NGO that received last year's UNCCD Land for Life Award, spoke about biodynamic agriculture in drylands that is implemented by SEKEM in Egypt.

#### **THEMATIC DIALOGUE 2: ROLE OF INNOVATIVE INVESTMENT FOR TECHNICAL COOPERATION**

Moderated by Mr. Wu Zhimin, Director General of International Forestry Cooperation Center, SFA, this session was an interactive dialogue of the panelists and the audience. Mr. Simone Quatrini, Coordinator and Team Leader, LDN Fund of UNCCD, presented the policy and investment analysis of the Land Degradation Neutrality Fund. Mr. Byong Hyon Kwon, UNCCD Drylands Ambassador, Founder of Korea Future Forest, spoke about the decades of his greening effort in Kubuqi desert through the Green Corps Save the World initiative. Mr. Chen Peng, Deputy Director General, China Green Foundation (CGF), explained how to mobilize the private sector by creating win-win situations, and how this could contribute to the Belt and Road Joint Action Initiative. Mr. Frank Radstake, Principle Environment Specialist, Asian Development Bank, shared lessons learned on innovative financing and investment projects. The key in project investment, he said, is to get the incentives and finances right, and to keep monitoring the results. Mr. Xi Shusen, Director, Inner Mongolia Society of Ecology and Entrepreneurs, responded to the question why he is interested in ecology, which seems to conflict with profit seeking. To repay the society, was his key point. Mr. Romano De Vivo, Head Environmental Policy Representative, Syngenta, talked about the relationship between benefits and sustainability. Finally, Mr. Zhao Yong, Executive Secretary of Kubuqi Desert Forum, Elion Group, talked about Elion's desert-ecology business model and, how to make it greener as well as successful, innovative, people-centered and nature friendly. Mr. Wu summarized the dialogue in four key words: consensus; expectation; partnership and sustainability.

#### **AWARD CEREMONY**

Following the dialogue sessions, China Green Foundation held an award-giving ceremony for the groups that had made great contributions to land restoration, desertification control and sustainable use of natural resources in China. Mr. Chen Peng, Deputy Director General of Green

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Foundation and Mr. Tu Zhifang, Chief Engineer of State Forestry Administration presented the awards to Hangren High Technology Company and Lingfeng Husbandry Company.

### **LAUNCH: UNLOCKING THE SUSTAINABLE POTENTIAL OF LAND RESOURCES: EVALUATION SYSTEMS, STRATEGIES AND TOOLS**

Session moderator, Ms. Hori, introduced the session on the report of the International Resource Panel by summing it up with a Chinese proverb: “Select a proper site for your garden, and half your work is done.” Mr. Shaoyi Li, Head of the Secretariat of the International Resource Panel, United Nations Environment Programme, and Mr. Hu Peixing, Director General, National Bureau to Combat Desertification, SFA, Dr. Jeff Herrick, Research Soil Scientist, Agriculture Research Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, and a lead author of the report, made presentations about the report. Then copies of the report were presented to the representatives from the Government, University, Research institute and civil society organizations.



Opening of Beijing Observance in China