



**Message of Ibrahim Thiaw**  
**Executive Secretary, UN Convention to Combat Desertification**

**World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought**  
**17 June 2019**

**“Let’s grow the future together”**

There are only three things you need to know about the World Day to Combat Desertification: it isn’t just about sand, it isn’t an isolated issue that will quietly disappear, and it isn’t someone else’s problem. It’s about restoring and protecting the fragile layer of land which only covers a third of the Earth, but which can either alleviate or accelerate the double-edged crisis facing our biodiversity and our climate. That makes it the problem of anyone who wants to eat, drink or breathe; to make their home in a town, in the country or even in security; to use technology, medicine or infrastructure; to have equal access to work, learning or relaxation. To live.

Twenty-five years ago, the international community acknowledged the central role our land plays in that equation and beyond, by creating the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. Since then, 196 countries and the European Union have signed up to coordinated actions for sustainable land management. They have restored well over five million hectares of land in the Sahel region to produce half a million tons of grain each year. They have used forests to help farmers in Brazil, Indonesia, China and India improve their crops and water supplies. They have fueled a land restoration economy in the US to generate around USD25 billion and 126,000 jobs in a single year. And there are similar stories around the world.

However, there are even more stories about how poor land management has degraded an area twice the size of China and shaped a farming sector that contributes nearly a quarter of all greenhouse gases. There are even more stories about how half the people on this planet are affected by that damaged land or live in urban areas, consuming resources that require 200 times as much land as their towns and cities and generating 70 per cent of emissions.

For the next 25 years, I would love to say that as the only international treaty dealing with land management, we have our work cut out to turn that around before the population reaches nine billion. But I can’t. We simply don’t have that long. Because unless we rapidly get control of the land that underpins our biodiversity and provides the second largest carbon reservoir on this planet, we will trigger a series of reactions that puts the outcome entirely *beyond* our control.

Which is why the world is determined that by 2030, we will switch from destroying the Earth to making it productive enough to grow a better future for everyone. If we take action to restore our degraded land, it will save \$1.3 billion a day to invest in the education, equality and clean energy that can reduce poverty, conflict and migration.

In recent months, the leading authorities from science, finance and government have sounded the alarm about the very real, very imminent threats from biodiversity loss and climate



change. Better land management does not hold all the answers, but it offers a stepping stone to reach our goals by 2030 and then act as a natural multiplier of their benefits.

People around the world are learning to understand their own impact on the climate and make choices to reduce it. But, if we want to keep three times as much carbon locked beneath our feet as above them, then we also need to understand our impact on the land and learn to live within our means.

So, for this World Day to Combat Desertification, I am calling on everyone to drive this change from the ground up; to make choices and take action, either privately or professionally, as producers or consumers, to protect and restore our land. Let's grow the future together.