

Message on the World Day to Combat Desertification

17 June 2004

This year on World Day to Combat Desertification, we mark the 10th anniversary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), which plays a key role in the world's efforts to eradicate poverty, achieve sustainable development and reach the Millennium Development Goals.

The Convention is the only internationally recognized, legally binding instrument that addresses the problem of land degradation in dryland rural areas. It enjoys a truly universal membership of 191 parties. And, through the Global Environment Facility as its funding mechanism, it is able to channel much-needed resources to projects aimed at combating the problem, particularly in Africa.

The risks of desertification are substantial and clear. Desertification undermines the fertility of the world's land, with productivity losses reaching 50 percent in some areas. It contributes to food insecurity, famine and poverty, and can give rise to social, economic and political tensions that can cause conflicts, further poverty and land degradation. Current estimates are that the livelihoods of more than 1 billion people are at risk from desertification, and that, as a consequence, 135 million people may be in danger of being driven from their land. The rural poor, especially in the developing world, are especially vulnerable. Indeed, recognizing the urgent need to address the far-reaching implications of this problem, the General Assembly has declared 2006 the International Year of Deserts and Desertification.

On the tenth anniversary of the Convention's adoption, I congratulate all the stakeholders on the achievements of the past decade, and encourage them to confirm and strengthen their commitment to the UNCCD process. I look forward to working with Governments, civil society, the private sector, international organizations and others to focus attention on this crucial issue, and to make every day one on which we work to reverse the trend of desertification and set the world on a safer, more sustainable path of development.



Kofi Annan

Secretary-General