

OPENING REMARKS OF MR. LUC GNACADJA EXECUTIVE SECRETARY UN CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION

**Side Event: Practical Steps to Drought Preparedness and Risk Management
Monday, 11 March 2013
12:30-13:30 hrs
CICG Room 3**

Ladies and gentlemen,

You have heard it many times today: droughts have devastating effects on people, on livelihoods, the economy. Water stress or scarcity and desertification are some of its most severe environmental consequences.

The current response to drought: too little too late. We have once again experienced the cost of late response to early warning in the 2011 drought in the Horn of Africa. More than 13 million people affected, mostly women and children; lives and livelihoods have been devastated – estimate suggest that more than 50,000 people have died, more than half of them children under five; and the crisis continues. But there were indications that a crisis was coming from as early as August 2010.

Such reactive and post-impact approaches and responses not only increases the socio-economic cost but also increases the vulnerability and reduces the resilience of affected communities and ecosystems to future droughts

In our globalized world, vulnerability to drought has increased globally. Last year (2012) drought in the USA had a remarkable global effect on food prices. The same occurred in 2007 with drought in Australia which was acknowledged as one of the major causes of the 2008 global food crisis

"Between 1997 and 2007, Ethiopia lost on average US\$1.1bn to drought every year; this almost eclipses the US\$1.3bn per year that Ethiopia received in international assistance to tackle poverty and emergencies over the same period" (in "A Dangerous Delay - The cost of late response to early warnings in the 2011 drought in the Horn of Africa" Joint agency report by Save the children and Oxfam; Jan 2012)

The collective and inappropriate response to drought represents a systemic failure of national governments and the international system. Early action is more effective and cost-effective.

Why is there such reluctance for preparedness, risk management and early response?
Maybe because of

- Ignorance of the real socio-economic cost of inaction Vs that of preparedness and risk management, and
- fear of acting on early warning which also means acting on uncertainties – with both financial and reputational risk at stake;

The factors and drivers of vulnerability to drought include:

- Poverty and dependence on rain-fed agriculture especially in developing countries where the economy relies heavily on rain-fed agriculture, dominated by small-scale and subsistence farming.
- Desertification and environmental degradation;
- Weak institutional framework and governance;
- Political instability, social and civil conflicts:

Recent research suggests that droughts increase the likelihood of communal violence, civil wars or even wars between nations, including its major implications in terms of lives lost and increasingly, long term economic losses

It is the devastating and enduring impacts of drought in the 1970 that led to the global efforts to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought. These efforts culminated with the signing of the treaty that I am mandated to implement – the UN Convention to Combat Desertification or simply, the UNCCD.

Today, the science says we cannot escape a 2-degree Celsius temperature rise. In fact we are on course to a 4-degree rise if we continue doing business as usual. So there is no doubt that droughts will become more intense, more frequent and more widespread. The evidence on the ground already confirms this trend.

Since 1950, dry areas have expanded by just under 2% every decade and every region of the world has suffered drought in recent years.

In the UNCCD secretariat we have invested in this Conference in the belief that it is the best and quickest way to achieve the desired result: making history by assisting governments and all stakeholders to move from crisis management to preparedness and risk management.

This side event is testimony of our commitment. We are starting a global awareness raising and action campaign right here right now, by calling for action to set up policies, mechanisms and systems that will pre-empt future devastating impacts of drought, with this rallying call from the secretariat: **“Do not let our future dry up.”**

By 17 June, when we hold the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, we want every stakeholder, every community in the world to know and say by action “never again” to drought disasters related tragedies.

For a more drought resilient society let us start with action that empowers the households, the communities among us that are the most vulnerable to drought, for we are only as strong as the weakest among us. We want every individual and every private company with the power to act and join in and say “let's build a drought resilient economy, society”.

As a start, the UNCCD has teamed up with two UN-wide campaigns to make it happen: the UN Decade on Deserts and the Fight against Desertification and the UN Decade on Biodiversity.

In closing let me ask you a more personal question. Do you really believe that we can do something? Like the single vote in a general election, any action on your part, however small, is a vote to end the impact of drought. It matters.

So don't let our future dry up through your inaction.

I invite you to join this campaign train and get it moving and rolling through Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe and all the Islands of the world. Join the online campaign to get the message out. Use your cellular phone to spread the message right now about this event and join in the action.

Do something practical and vote out the drought. We can do it. Let's stop procrastinating and prevaricating and make it happen this year! Not next year. Not when the next drought hits. This is the International Year for Water Cooperation; the year for a decisive action on drought. Get it done now. Don't let our future dry up.
