

Words of Welcome by Dr Reza Ardakanian Director, UN-Water Decade Programme on Capacity Development (UNW-DPC)

On the occasion of the Observance of the World Day to Combat Desertification

17 June 2009

Old City Hall, Markt, Bonn

Distinguished Bürgermesiter Mr Ulrich Hauschild, City of Bonn Mr Luc Gnacadja, Executive Secretary of UNCCD

Mr. Arnt Diener of BINUM/SINUB

Honourable guests, Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to welcome you on behalf of the Chair of the Heads of UN Agencies in Bonn for the Observance of the World Day to Combat Desertification, which is celebrated today here in the City of Bonn as well as in many other cities around the world. It is with pleasure that we join the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the Institute of Geography of the University of Bonn and the BIMUN for this special day calling for international attention and action on one of the most pressing issues our planet is currently facing: land degradation and desertification. And in particular, we share the clear message of this year's slogan: „Conserving land and water equals securing our common future“.

As Director of the UN-Water Decade Programme on Capacity Development (UNW-DPC) which is hosted by the United Nations University in Bonn, and is a programme established to support and strengthen the coordination and coherence of the water-related capacity development activities of the more than 26 members and partners of UN-Water, I can only emphasize how important and necessary coordinated approaches are to provide efficient responses to global challenges such as desertification, land degradation and droughts.

Although the world's desertification-related problems are growing increasingly and need to be addressed urgently, it is recognized that they cannot be solved by the action of governments alone. It will also require the education, capacity development, mobilization and involvement of all sections of society. As is being demonstrated by the continuous efforts made by UNCCD, helping people to better understand water and land issues and their interactions will contribute to finding solutions,.

In this sense, as a contribution to the International Decade „Water for Life“ and to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, UNW-DPC, in cooperation with UN-Water, of which UNCCD is a member, intends to add value to existing UN programmes and projects in order to foster more cooperation and information-sharing among UN agencies and external partners in areas related to capacity development in integrated water and land management at the regional and sub-regional levels.

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I would also like to emphasize the important role that the media plays on influencing public opinion on key issues such as water, desertification, land degradation and drought. The media today has immense reach and can be a great and powerful tool to create public awareness and advocacy for the promotion of sectoral reforms to support the Millennium Development Goals and the Convention to Combat Desertification. The expectation is that with increased media attention to these issues, there will be more public awareness, which in turn will attract more attention from decision-makers on these issues.

The presence of a strong UN community in Bonn composed of the more than 17 Agencies and Programmes with a clear focus on environmental and human issues (such as desertification, climate changes, migratory species, human security, health) is a unique opportunity to develop synergies that can provide a global, integrated responses to these challenging issues. On behalf of the Chair of the Heads of UN Agencies in Bonn, and of UNW-DPC and UN-Water, I would therefore like to extend our hand of cooperation and support to this endeavour, which, ultimately, is a shared responsibility of us all.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish you a fruitful and joyful observance of the World Day to Combat Desertification and many interesting debates and discussions that I know will follow from listening to and joining in with the series of exciting lectures that has been planned in today's programme.

Thank you