

Message by H.E.Dr. Han Seung-soo, President of the General Assembly at the
occasion of the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought
17 June 2002

In about two months, the World Summit on Sustainable Development will take place in Johannesburg. The international community will have the opportunity to assess progress achieved in implementing Agenda 21, including chapter 12 on combating desertification and drought. Every year, 6 million hectares of productive land are being lost due to land degradation. Some 70 percent of the 5.2 billion hectares drylands used for agriculture are being degraded and threatened by desertification. This constitutes one of the most acute challenges damaging not only our earth's environment, but also affecting sustainable livelihood of hundreds of millions of people. In Northeast Asia, for example, the phenomenon of "Yellow Dust" originating from deserts causes enormous economic and social costs for countries affected.

More than a hundred countries lie entirely or partly within dry lands affected by desertification. Not only least developed countries in Africa but many other developing countries all around the world are seriously affected by ever-aggravating desertification. Poverty and environmental degradation are linked in a complex, often mutually reinforcing relationship. Combating desertification and eradicating poverty in dry lands should be therefore considered as interrelated objectives. In this respect, I would like to urge once again that the international community redouble their efforts for the speedy and effective implementation of the various development goals inscribed in the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification is a cooperative quest of the human community to address the environmental and social causes of desertification and its consequences, in particular poverty, food insecurity and forced massive migrations. In particular, we must focus on implementing the already adopted Action Programmes of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. I urge all countries to join their efforts to stop desertification, which will help secure healthy and green earth for us and our future generations.