

25 years UNCCD



UNCCD turns twenty-five! For 25 years the Convention has played a major role in fighting desertification, land degradation and mitigating the effects of drought. Lots of scientific articles, publications and awareness raising materials supported and challenged during those years which backed the achievement of today.

In the run-up towards the World Day to Combat Desertification on 17 June, the library will open the archives to look back the important milestones of the Convention, such as the first scientific evidence about desertification, authentic papers from the negotiation process before 1994, videos and documentaries, and awareness raising materials. Each month around the 17th, the library will display these materials on the 15 floor hall.

This monthly exhibition will be posted on the WDCD web page to provide the online visitors a unique perspectives of the Convention's growth throughout all these years.

1973-1991

What is desertification?

The concept 'desertification' reverts back to the works of the French researcher Aubreville, who, in 1949, introduced it for the process of loss of vegetation cover. Although quite some research on the ecology and economy of dryland zones had been undertaken by UNESCO, WMO and FAO in the 1960s, the term desertification was first applied politically during the Sahel crisis in the 70s, and mentioned as a terminus technicus in 1974 as part of the UN General Assembly's resolution 29/337, initiated by Burkina Faso, which called for the convocation of UNCOD. (Aubreville, A. (1949). *Climats, Forêts et Dés ertification de l'Afrique Tropicale*. Paris, Société d'Editions Géographiques, Maritimes et Coloniales)

UN Plan of Action to Combat Desertification presented to the United Nations Conference on Desertification(UNCOD) in response to [General Assembly resolution 3337 \(XXIX\) of 17 December 1974 on international co-operation to combat desertification](#)

DID YOU KNOW? Facts and figures

- 1968-1973 Sahelian drought was over
- 1974 United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO) to assist drought-stricken countries
- 1977 United Nations Conference on Desertification (UNCOD) 29 August- 9 September 1977 Nairobi, Kenya
- 1977 UNCOD outcome- Plan of action to combat desertification (PACD)- The goal is to implement the Plan by the year 2000
- 1978 UNEP created Desertification Branch
- 1978-1984- First global assessment of Plan of action to combat desertification (UNEP Governing Council 12th session)Dr. Mostafa Tolba Executive Director report and recommendations for countries to establish National Plans of action to combat desertification
- [Seven years After the 1977 UN Conference on Desertification: Lessons learned or to be learned](#) (M. Kassas)

Among the UNCOD recommendations:

1. To create institutions to coordinate the plans

2. An Inter-Agency Working Group on Desertification (IAWGD), the body entrusted with coordinating activities of the United Nations System to combat Desertification.
 3. The General Assembly, by resolution 33/80 of 15 December 1978, decided to designate the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO), as the arm of the UN responsible for assisting, on behalf of UNEP, the efforts of the countries of the Sudano-Sahelian region to implement the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification. A total of 21 countries receive assistance through UNSO.
 4. Desertification Unit (subsequently retitled Desertification Control Programme Activity Centre – as per DC/PAC. Ref - UNEP GC decision 12/10 para. 23)
 5. Special account to combat desertification established in the UN– March 1979
 6. Inter Agency Working Group on Desertification (IAWGD) hold its 2nd meeting 17 September 1979
- 1982-1983 severe drought
 - 1989 - Consultative Group for Desertification Control (DESCON) to assist the Executive Director of UNEP in the mobilization of resources for the formulation and implementation of anti-desertification projects.
 - Consultative Group for Desertification Control to meet every year until the conference on environment and development is held in 1992 and every two years thereafter, and reaffirms its mandate as contained in resolutions 32/172 of 19 December 1977 and 39/168 of 17 December 1984; Source (A/RES/44/172, 83rd plenary meeting, 19 December 1989)
 - Summit of the seven major industrial nations, held in Paris from 14 to 16 July 1989, in aspects of the struggle against desertification and, specifically, in the planned observatory for the Sahara and the Sahel;
 - The UNSO continued in 1991 under UNDP supervision to assist countries in the medium and long term recovery and rehabilitation programme.
 - **[Link to the library catalogue with all historical files \(copy and paste in your browser\)](http://library.unccd.int/search/detail?database=fullCatalogue&fieldname=Field_ContentKeyword&value=historical%20collection)**

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The people whose life and work have been associated with the UNCCD pre-convention history:

- ***Dr. Mohamed Abdel Fattah Al-Kassas*** (also known as ***Mohamed Kassas***, July 6, 1921 – March 21, 2012) was an Egyptian botanist and conservationist. He was professor emeritus for Botany at the University of Cairo and a specialist in Arid land Ecology. ***A specialist in the ecology of desert plants, and was among the first to publish on the topic of desertification.***
- ***Mostafa Kamal Tolba*** (8 December 1922 – 28 March 2016) was an Egyptian scientist who served for seventeen years as the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). UNEP Executive Director, Mr. Mostafa Kamal Tolba, drew extensively on the resources of the world scientific community. Four scholarly reviews were commissioned that looked at the relationship of desertification to climate, ecological change, technology and society.
- ***Maurice Frederick Strong*** (April 29, 1929 – November 27, 2015) was a Canadian oil and mineral businessman and a diplomat who served as Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations. *The Convention has clearly proven that desertification and the threats it poses do not constitute insurmountable challenges, but are ones that can be overcome.*

The John Paul II Foundation for the Sahel

The John Paul II Foundation for the Sahel was founded by Pope John Paul II in 1984, after his first visit to Africa, where he personally experienced the great tragedy of the population affected by drought and desertification. The headquarters are in Ouagadougou. With the collaboration of the Italian Episcopal Conference and of the local Churches and communities, the Foundation is committed to giving testimony to the closeness of the Pope to the people living in the poorest areas of the planet, by promoting projects to fight desertification, in areas such as the environment, agricultural development, water pumping systems and renewable energy. The Foundation also trains specialized technical personnel, who can be at the service of their Country.

Finally, over the years, the Foundation has become an instrument of inter-religious dialogue: the majority of the beneficiaries, in fact, are Muslim.

The Foundation includes the 9 countries that are part of the Sahel area: Burkina Faso, Cape

Verde, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Chad.

[visit the official website](#)

In its over 30 years of life, the work of the John Paul II Foundation for the Sahel is very positive - says Card. Sarah, former President of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum, to which the Foundation is entrusted - especially if we consider the average 130 projects funded every year. **Its aim is to fight desertification, to promote sustainable agriculture practices and to train local people, so that they can take their future into their hands.**

Msgr. Dal Toso, Secretary of Cor Unum, explains that, according to the UN, since 2004 there has been a 430% increase in humanitarian needs around the world. The help provided by the Foundation, aiming at fostering integral human promotion, is therefore crucial for one of the most fragile areas of the planet, regularly hit by famine every 3 or 4 years.

Source: <http://www.corunum.va/content/corunumexpo/en/fondazioni/fondazione-giovanni-paolo-ii.html>

http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/lent/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19091992_lent-1993.html

<http://www.pas.va/content/dam/accademia/pdf/sv100.pdf>

<http://www.pas.va/content/dam/accademia/pdf/sv100.pdf#page=275>