



United Nations
Convention to Combat
Desertification

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Speech on the occasion of the

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The Forest – Energy nexus

Excellency,

Distinguished guests,

Dear colleagues and friends,

Province after province around the Mediterranean was turned to desert, 2000 years ago, by the rapid expansion of the Roman Empire **and an urgent need for food, fuel and shelter.**

It reminded me of a quote by the French philosopher François-René de Chateaubriand who once said *"Forests precede civilizations and deserts follow them"*.

It seems our civilization has not progressed that far in 2000 years!

- Every 60 seconds -- we cut down 15 hectares of forest primarily to make room for food or energy production.



- Between 1990 and 2015, the world lost some 129 million hectares of forest - an area the size of South Africa.

When we take away the forest it is not just the trees that go. The entire ecosystem begins to fall apart. With dire consequences for us all.

In terms of climate change and the water cycle certainly - but also in terms of future energy provision.

- Deforestation and forest degradation are responsible for just over 17% of all man-made greenhouse gas emissions.

For now, some 296 gigatonnes of carbon are stored in the world's forests in both above and below ground biomass. But for how long?



The need for food, fuel and shelter is still turning forests to deserts every day.

- For every million kilos of beef exported from South America some 45,000 hectares of rainforest are cleared.
- And in many low-income countries fuel wood is still the most important forest product - it represents 93% of the total harvested wood. While charcoal provides 82 % of the urban and 34 % of the rural domestic energy in Africa.

The 300 million people who live in forests worldwide are counting on us to break the spiral of forest loss and degradation while allowing people to eat and have access to the energy, water and incomes the forest provides.

So, how might we approach this?

In my mind, we can manage the trade-offs better - in particular, getting the choices right where land use, water and energy collide.



The time for small scale “pilot project” is coming to an end. We know that sustainable, efficient technologies and alternatives - to charcoal and fuel wood – work if they are in the hands of consumers.

Our bio-fuels and hydro-electric strategies, while well-meaning, can sometimes be low carbon but not truly sustainable or friendly to the forests or the land. We can reflect a little more perhaps on these unintended consequences and revisit how we approach these strategies.

While, if we shift our consumption patterns and sustainably manage and rehabilitate the degraded land we have outside forests; there will be less pressure for agricultural expansion into forests. I would like to see techniques like agroforestry go mainstream, for example.

Above all, a new integrated way of doing business is something that would benefit everyone.



The 105 countries participating in the Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme with UNCCD account for example represent more than 54 percent of global forest cover.

Just these 105 countries have lost 64 million ha of forest between 1990 and 2015.

Most of these countries will include specific forest-based targets such as increasing the amount of forested area or its productivity in their LDN targets.

We would love to be working with you, indeed with all forestry stakeholders, to get the land, forest and energy communities working together. To get SDG 15 and SDG 7 delivered together.

Man-made deserts should not follow mankind's "so-called" civilization.

I very much welcome the day the forest community puts me out of a job.

Thank you.