

Opening Remarks of Monique Barbut

Executive Secretary, UN Convention to Combat Desertification

Land for Life Day

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(469 words)

Mr. Erdogan Özevren, Head of General Directorate of Combating
Desertification and Erosion,
Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Doug Tompkins, the founder of Esprit and The North Face once said:
“Since we humans have degraded so much of the planet, we also have almost
endless opportunities to return ecosystems to health. Ecological restoration is
a growth industry and the work of the humankind’s future.”

His words are so true! There is enough evidence to show that by
rehabilitating and restoring land of 150 million hectares as pledged in Bonn
Challenge (just nearly one tenth of the total degraded land in the world) we
could reduce CO₂ emission gap by 11%-17%. And on top of that 6 billion USD
additional crop yields would be generated.

Today, at this Land for Life Day event we are highlighting the benefits of
achieving Land Degradation Neutrality, which is now part of the Sustainable
Development Goals. By achieving land Degradation Neutrality we could
effectively combat climate change, stop the loss of biodiversity, and strengthen
human security and social stability.

We will showcase the success stories of our partners and land
rehabilitation pioneers that achieved sustainable land management. For
example:

- 12,000 households who were once refugees affected by sand storms and desertification in Mongolia, now have found their way back to their homes through activities initiated by Green Asia Networks, winner of 2014 Land for Life Award.
- The restoration over 10,000 square kilometers of degraded land in Kubuqi by Elion Resources Group, the 2015 Land for Life Award winner, has successfully stop loss of biodiversity. The restored land is now home to more than 100 species wild animals and plants.
- The approach of another 2015 Land for Life Award winner, SEKEM through biodynamic agriculture turned more than 2,000 hectare of barren lands into productive land, not only created wealth but also sequestered carbon

The list of these success stories could go on and on...

To achieve Land degradation neutrality we need to find these stories for possible replication or scaling up. We should all be combining good land management and massive scaling up of restoration activities. Enabling policies, the supports of government, the private sector and individuals will have to come to work together.

At UNCCD, we will continue to highlight success stories of land restoration and its contribution to life to sustainable development and to coping with climate change. We will take every opportunity to do so.

With that in mind, I would like to thank the Government of Turkey and other partners who supported this event at the Rio Conventions Pavilion and the COP12 in Ankara.

And I wish you all an enjoyable and successful event.