

GENDER DAY, FRIDAY, 16 OCTOBER BRIEFING NOTE AND WELCOME REMARKS

Time & Venue: 09:00-10:00 am, Rio Convention's Pavilion, 4th Floor, Congressium-ATO International Conventions and Exhibitions Center.

Participants: 100 participants including 70 Delegates and 2015 COP participants, 30 participants from CSOs in Turkey and high-ranking government delegates. Namely Ms. Barbara Thomson (Deputy Minister for Env. and Water Resources, South Africa), Ms. Sidibe Aminata Diallo (Minister of Environment Namibia and former Minister of National Education, Mali) and Ambassador Ms. Nina Vaskunlahti of Finland.

Background: UNCCD is the sole Rio Convention that recognizes the importance of gender equality in the pursuit of sustainable development. Parties at COP11 approved the gender advocacy policy framework to construct the Convention's work on gender. In Turkey, Gender Day will highlight the policies needed to strengthen gender equality in terms of land rights, decision-making on land use issues, building resilient livelihoods and in pursuing land degradation neutrality. These issues are based on a global research study, jointly commissioned by the UNCCD and UNDP, and carried out by the Natural Resources Institute of the University of Greenwich in the United Kingdom. Gender Day was also held at COP11 and focused on the constraints and opportunities for women's empowerment in accessing the resources, knowledge and authority they need to address desertification, land degradation and drought.

Objectives and key messages:

1. To welcome the participants of Gender Day
2. To acknowledge the UNCCD's commitment to give attention to gender disparities which undermine the implementation of the Convention
3. To highlight the Executive Secretary's expectations of Gender Day and lay the framework to focus the discussions

**MONIQUE BARBUT, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
WELCOMING REMARKS, GENDER DAY
FRIDAY, 16 OCTOBER 2015**

Excellency Minister,

Excellency Ms. Barbara Thomson, Deputy Minister for Environment and Water
Resources for South Africa,

Your Excellency Ambassador, Ms. Nina Vaskunlahti of Finland,

Distinguished Speakers and Delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good Morning! Welcome to Gender Day here in Ankara, Turkey.

As you know, there are three Rio Conventions – on Biodiversity, on Climate Change, and on Desertification. Our Convention on desertification has a unique place among these Conventions for two reasons. One, it balances development and environmental issues. It does not overlook the people that live in these

environments. Two, as women, men, youth and local communities, the Convention recognizes the social roles these people have in the use of the land. We have the mandates that the activists in the other Rio Conventions have been fighting for.

So why, 20 years later, don't we have a mature working programme on gender under the UNCCD? How long are we going to talk about gender before we actually do something about it? What will it take to address the gender disparities that are keeping more than 1.5 billion people insecure of food and water?

Last month, the international community adopted 17 Global Goals that include how to properly manage land resources. Target 15:3 calls for the restoration of degraded land and soil, to combat desertification, and to strive to become land degradation neutral. There is absolutely no way we can achieve this objective if we fail to give serious attention to gender. Why?

Men and women use land resources very differently, primarily due to their gendered social responsibilities. In actuality, these responsibilities are not always accompanied by an equal measure of the rights needed to carry out these duties.

For instance, in many traditional societies, it is still the woman's role to provide food and water for the homestead. As is evident from the current, tragic, mass migration from Syria, it is the women and who are also left behind to pick up the pieces of broken societies.

But how can we expect women to play these roles when they lack rights to the land the family owns and they lack rights in making decisions about how the land may be used to feed the family? How can we expect women to feed their families when they have no rights to grow and own the trees that they need for energy? How can women provide clean water for their families when they have no control over the chemicals that are used to increase the land's productivity, but in turn, pollute the water?

We should expect that if women do not have these rights, they will do whatever they can – even degrade the land and deplete every resource – in order to feed their children. But if we grant them the rights they need to carry out these responsibilities, they will be empowered to do more than just feed their families. They will seek to ensure that the land remains sufficiently fertile so that they can feed not just their children, but also sell their produce at the market. In addition, they will strive to feed their grand-children and great

grand-children. In summation, the road to land degradation neutrality is sharpened by a gendered view of who uses the land and why. And it is paved with land rights.

Compared to where we were 20 years ago, we have made a lot of progress in tracking the specific roles men and women play in land use. However, the community working on land use issues is not only crowded but also fragmented. In particular, I hope to learn from you today, where the UNCCD can add the most value in pursuing land degradation neutrality. Which tools are most effective in closing the gender gap in order to award women more rights? Is there a linking aspect that the Rio Conventions can tackle together to address these challenges?

By identifying a handful of concrete actions we can bridge the gender differences that would keep us from realizing Target 15:3 by 2030. This is how we must define our success today. I wish you all a wonderful meeting!
