



United Nations
Convention to Combat
Desertification

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Opening Speech

Youth Forum

Monique Barbut, UNCCD Executive Secretary

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Dear Friends,

I love talking to young people. It is one of the most rewarding aspects of my job.

And I am delighted that so many of you could join us today. It shows you care.

About nature. About the land. About your future.

The famous Chinese philosopher, Lao Tzu said "from caring comes courage". You are going to need to be quite brave and courageous.

Past overuse and mismanagement of the natural world has left us in a bit of a mess. 99% of our food comes from the land. Demand for food is increasing dramatically though as we add an extra 200,000 mouths every day.

We will be nearly 10 billion people on earth by 2050. We will need to increase agricultural production by 70% before 2050. How and where do you think we will grow the food? Already we lose 12 million hectares of land from production because of land degradation each year. We certainly don't want to do more damage by chopping down the forests and accelerating climate change further. As you might know, land degradation makes climate change worse. And vice versa. It is a vicious circle.

And I am concerned about the prospects for future generations if nothing changes. Young people will be increasingly forced to move to find jobs and



opportunity if their land can't produce anymore. In the worst case scenarios, competition for access to productive natural resources will grow and conflict will become commonplace. You will be the generation that has to face all that. It is going to take courage, hard work and vision to turn these trends on their head. But it can be done. And you can do it!

Rather than get caught up worrying about the challenges. I want young people to be able to take advantage of some of the opportunities degraded land offers. These opportunities, especially in terms of restoration, are going to be important for the future of millions of young people.

Did you know? The so called restoration economy generates between 10 and 40 jobs per USD 1 million invested. That is compared to a little over 5 jobs created by the oil & gas industry with the same level investment

Going forward, the smart money will invest, create jobs and set up businesses in this restoration sector. There are for example 1.5 billion hectares of degraded ecosystems with the potential for restoration. Nearly 500 million hectares of that is degraded and abandoned former agricultural land. If the restoration economy was working, there could be an extra 71 million jobs in the food and



agriculture sector alone by 2030. These jobs would be available for the millions of young people set to join the job market in the coming decades.

But is this a job you would choose?

Confucius was a very wise man. He once said "choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life".

So our challenge now is to make the land based sector attractive to young people. So that you will love it!

There are increasingly opportunities to make it "sexier". New drone technologies for planting. Precision equipment for irrigation. All controlled from your lap top or phone.

But is it enough?

Would you want to work for yourselves or for someone else? What kind of training would be needed?

Because we know while having a job is important. It is often not enough. Young people also care passionately about the planet. To love their job, young people – you - have to feel like you are making a difference.



Let me reassure you, if you get involved in the land sector you will not only be building yourselves a future. You will be contributing to global sustainable development

As you may know, at UNCCD we are focused on achieving land degradation neutrality. That is target 15.3 of the so-called sustainable development goals. These are targets that run until 2030 so you will have a big part in making them happen.

Land degradation neutrality is an accelerator for many of the other SDGs. Get it right and challenges like poverty, climate change or jobs will become a lot easier to manage.

So it would be great if young people adopt this target as their own.

Become our champions. Make sure your peers and your community knows about how critical land is for your future. And that together you can lead efforts to protect, manage and restore the land.

There are no limits to what is possible. You can be as creative and innovative as you like. This Forum is only a starting point. I anticipate seeing caring and courage and great leadership from your generation in the future.

Cháng jiāng hòu làng tuī qián làng.

“The energy of the new generation inspires the old.”



Thank you