



United Nations
Convention to Combat
Desertification

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Opening Speech

Open Dialogue sessions

Monique Barbut, UNCCD Executive Secretary

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Colleagues and Friends,

The Parties to UNCCD made a wise choice when, in 1997, they asked Civil Society Organizations to organize Open Dialogue Sessions. These sessions were experimental in the multilateral processes at that time. But have become a special feature of UNCCD discussions. The Parties to the Climate Convention ONLY agreed at the last session - held in Bonn in May 2017 - to try and replicate our success.

Our logic has always been that governments can do a lot. But they cannot do it all. They cannot do it alone. So meaningful engagement with civil society is – at the very least - enlightened self-interest.

All those who can play a role are invited to be part of the solution to land degradation and drought issues. And it isn't just the classic environmental NGOs who should be at the table. By tackling land degradation and - together - getting the implementation of this Convention right, we can help reduce poverty and boost food security, manage unplanned urbanization and forced migration,



stabilize communities in conflict, and combat both climate change and loss of biodiversity. So many groups should have a keen interest.

And I think you will see that in the last biennium, the CSO community - working through the CSO panel, has been making a valuable contribution.

In particular, I have been impressed - and want to highlight - the focus and dedication of the CSOs on matters related to land rights. The CSO dialogue in the High Level Segment next week will focus on this issue from a gender perspective.

And as civil society often underlines. If the UNCCD is a room - then land rights are the elephants in the corner. Increasingly, the elephant is up and walking around! For successful implementation of the Convention, it is not something we can ignore much longer.

Work, undertaken by the CSO panel with the support of external experts, has come strongly to the conclusion that protecting the rights of local populations to access the land we will be crucial to your efforts to deliver Land



Degradation Neutrality. Investment and good, long term management of the land will increase if land-users know that they have secure tenure and access.

NGOs who work closely with local communities can be a bridge – spreading knowledge and awareness - between Governments and local populations in this regard. And after this COP, there will be nearly 500 civil society organizations that have accredited status with the COP. They can help if we call on them to do so.

Already, with the support of the Global Mechanism and in many of the countries setting voluntary LDN targets, open dialogue sessions have become a standard part of national plans to achieve LDN.

As we enter the implementation phase, and with a revised Strategic Framework soon to be put in place, this practical partnership can go further. There is huge potential. Whether we leverage that potential is up to you!

I want to close by saying thank you to the CSOs for their commitment to the process. And for their determination to get substantive issues on the table.



I also want to recognize that this dialogue session and the work of the CSOs in the last two years has been made possible by support from the Governments of Switzerland, China and Turkey. I extend my sincerest appreciation of their financial support.

An important part of that investment was the DesertifActions Conference of civil society groups held in Strasbourg in June 2017. The Conference was organized by the city of Strasbourg and the associations CARI and Climate Chance.

*The outcomes have framed our theme for today's Open Dialogue discussions. That is **Climate and Land**. I know it is a matter that concerns us all deeply.*

I wish you a fruitful and constructive dialogue.

Thank you.

