

25
YEARS



United Nations
Convention to Combat
Desertification



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Opening Speech

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Under-Secretary-General & Executive Secretary
of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification**

COP 14 Opening Session

New Delhi, India, 2 September 2019

Excellency Mr Prakash Javadekar, Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change of the Republic of India and host to UNCCD COP14,

Excellency Mr Zhang Jianlong, representing the President of UNCCD COP13,

Honorable Delegates and Representatives of Parties

Representatives of Regional and International Organisations,

Representatives of Civil Society Organisations,

Representatives of the Media,

Honorable guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor and a pleasure to address this assembly, for the first time, as Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. I am proud to be serving the 197 Parties to the Convention.

Allow me to express my sincere gratitude to Minister Prakash Javadekar and his team for the warm welcome, and the hospitality extended to us and all participants. I am sure all delegates will agree with me that indeed, India is an «incredible» country! I would also like to salute your leadership and commitment in hosting the COP and for championing the land agenda.

Ladies and gentlemen,

For the next two weeks, we will be eight thousand tasked with making life better for the three and a half billion who are affected by the severe degradation of three quarters of our land.

But we can't do that by wielding frightening statistics about what happens if we don't change.

We have to offer a way to change.

- A way to harness the enormous potential of our land that rewrites the persistent narrative of doom and gloom, with one of peace and prosperity.

Maybe it's a good thing that we're starting this Conference on the Festival of Ganesh, because:

- He's known for removing obstacles, avoiding natural calamities and bringing good fortune.
- And if we succeed at this Conference, that's exactly what we will achieve:
 - removing obstacles to sustainable development,
 - avoiding natural disasters, particularly from climate change
 - and bringing wellbeing to everyone through the jobs and opportunities that land restoration creates.

My job the next couple of weeks is to give you a solid platform that will help you create the right conditions for you to take decisions, launch actions and build partnerships to scale up and speed up progress towards our common goals.

That's why, on Science Day, you will have access to experts who produced some of the key reports published this year. For example:

- The **International Resources Panel Outlook** showing that the excessive resource use is already generating half of our greenhouse emissions and could increase them by another 43% in the next 40 years. Unless, we adopt circular economic flows and extended product lifecycles, which would cut that emissions growth by 90% and *still* increase GDP by 8%.

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- The **IPBES Global Assessment**, expanding on their earlier land degradation report, to reveal that human impact is driving a million species towards extinction, whereas doing something about it would have incredible benefits for our society, economy and climate.
 - The **IPCC report** making huge strides in confirming those three-way connections between land, climate and biodiversity, and spelling out the consequences of inaction.
 - Then, responding to the request from COP 13, our **Science-Policy Interface** team have worked hard to complete three new technical reports covering:
 - The carbon benefits of sustainable land management,
 - The contribution of land degradation neutrality to well-being and livelihoods,

- And the role of land-based interventions in drought mitigation and risk management.
- There have been a lot of other valuable papers published, but the last ones I would like to make sure you have at hand are the **regional editions** of the **Global Land Outlook**.

So, with the science clearly spelling out what has to be done, the rest of us need to decide:

- how it translates into policies that work for each Party,
- and how it combines with partnerships that advance our priorities.

There are quite a few opportunities to do that but let me quickly mention a couple:

First, the **thematic days on drought, and sand and dust storms.**

- It is estimated that 25% of global dust flying around are due deforestation, over-grazing or industrial activities. Land degradation contributes dangerously to human health risks of diseases like asthma, meningitis or valley fever.
- Land erosion is a major cause of poor water quality, which again negatively affects our health and our economy.
- Droughts are causing serious impacts on agriculture, livestock, industry, transport, water and air quality. In most parts of the world, years of droughts correspond to years of economic downturn.
- We need to build on progress achieved over the last two years, in particular on the drought plans being developed by over 70 Parties, with the support of the Secretariat. In

addition to the drought toolbox we already have, many countries have expressed the need to have an integrated early warning system, better preparedness as well as a mitigation/recovery plan to drought.

- Pursuant to your decision at COP13, we have prepared a specific report on drought for your consideration.

While the **Forums for Youth, Business and Cities and Local Government** will do exactly what they say on the tin.

- More than 80% of the youth in the OECD countries believe it's their *duty* to improve the world,
- And more than two thirds of us will be living in towns and cities by 2050.
- Making this a *unique* chance to listen to and learn from a cross section of people representing a huge number of voters, taxpayers or consumers.

Ladies and gentlemen,

By this time next week, we'll be into the High-Level Segment, which will reinforce the work behind the Delhi Declaration, lead to political momentum and promote guidance on priority areas. For example, across the three roundtables:

1. The first roundtable will explore how land can provide a third of the mitigation required by 2030, complement renewable energy growth and build resistance to flooding and drought.
 - For example, peatland restoration can be 15 times cheaper than technical carbon capture and storage, while combining solar energy and agriculture can restore soil quality and jobs.

2. The second roundtable will look at how integrated resource management helps both urban and rural areas.

- For example, using holistic planning and governance to enhance natural synergies, like local farm to fork supply chains, can alleviate food and water pressures in urban areas, while reducing poverty and insecurity to stem migration from rural areas.

3. The third roundtable will help to accelerate the SDGs by leveraging the UN Decade for Ecosystem Restoration.

- For example, there are over 1.5 billion hectares of forest where restoring the balance of natural and working ecosystems can increase agriculture yields, soil quality and jobs.

- With potential returns on investment of up to 30-1, it's something that could certainly be highlighted more in the debates about fires raging from the Arctic to Africa, to the Amazon.
- But then, let us also look at the disappearing drylands, wetlands and peatlands.

Apart from being massively underutilized opportunities, it's worth noting that all three roundtables:

- Can offer practical, cost-efficient solutions where a single investment reaps multiple benefits for people, as well as the climate or ecosystems.
- Can help reduce gender and rural inequality, which in turn scales up and accelerates those benefits.

- And can radically step up that transformation through the involvement of indigenous and faith-based communities, investors and businesses, and youth.

Those roundtables will set the scene for the interactive dialogues, ensuring we keep that very human face of land degradation at the heart of discussions on how to:

1. Accelerate the global shift in demand for values-based stewardship, that a new generation of leaders is advocating for through their lifestyles, careers and purchases.
2. Respond to the way healthy land supports healthy people, by reinforcing the life support system for our food and

water, and reducing the threats from pollution, disasters, malnutrition, drug resistance and migration.

3. And finally, exploiting those synergies to build value chains that boost businesses and create jobs using areas like technology transfer, traditional knowledge and crop diversification. Something you will see explored further at the Technology Fair.

Mesdames et messieurs,

Au-delà des célébrations des 25 ans de notre Convention, et du partenariat extraordinaire qui s'est forgé, à travers les peuples et les continents sur le rôle essentiel des terres, nous avons une obligation d'introspection et une responsabilité de prospection :

- Avons-nous renversé la tendance de dégradation des terres ?
- Quel impact avons-nous eu sur les peuples vulnérables et sur les écosystèmes ? Quels changements radicaux souhaitons-nous voir adoptés par les leaders du monde, aussi bien du secteur public que du secteur privé ?
- Comment appréhendons-nous le rôle essentiel des terres dans la lutte contre le changement climatique ?

Le changement de paradigme commence ici, dans cette salle, avec les acteurs présents. Ou il ne sera point. Notre COP ne doit pas simplement être associé au chiffre 14, un numéro de série.

Notre COP se prévaut d'un cumul de plusieurs milliers d'années d'expérience ; une accumulation de volumes entiers de connaissances modernes comme traditionnelles.

Notre COP à New Delhi peut constituer un tournant décisif dans notre façon de faire voir la problématique de la dégradation des terres et de faire valoir les solutions à y apporter.

Restaurer les terres, c'est ouvrir de nouvelles opportunités de création d'emplois verts, de création de chaînes de valeurs, et donc de richesse. De passer du « basket case » où l'on demande l'assistance, au « business case » qui au contraire, invite à l'investissement.

Investir dans la restauration des terres est l'une des solutions les moins chères et les plus efficaces pour stocker le carbone, et ainsi, lutter contre le changement climatique. C'est aussi une réponse pragmatique et efficace au défi de conservation de la biodiversité et des services écosystémiques.

La science est claire à ce sujet. Les analyses économiques convergent : investir sur les terres ; créent des opportunités.

Notre COP repose donc sur le postulat que nous sommes tous des décideurs et que nos choix feront la différence. Bâtissons ensemble sur ses opportunités !

Je vous remercie.
