

**25**  
YEARS



**United Nations**  
Convention to Combat  
Desertification



**Check against delivery**

## **Opening Speech**

**Ibrahim Thiaw**  
**Under-Secretary-General & Executive Secretary**  
**of the United Nations Convention to Combat**  
**Desertification**

**COP 14 Opening Session of the High-Level Segment**

**New Delhi, 9 September 2019**

***“For Defne”***

Excellence, Monsieur le Premier Ministre de la République d’Inde, Narendra Modi,

Nul pays autre que l’Inde était mieux placé pour abriter cette quatorzième Conférence des Parties. Celle-ci est une rencontre charnière. Elle marque le jubilé d’argent de la Convention des Nations Unies sur la lutte contre la désertification tout en s’inscrivant vers l’horizon 2050.

L’Inde, ce « pays incroyable », est l’interface entre tradition, fondée sur de riches civilisations, et modernité, caractérisée par les progrès technologiques innovants, les autoroutes de l’information, et la magie de Bollywood, de Bangalore ou encore des programmes de villes intelligentes à Chandigarh, Nagpur ou Pondichéry.

L'Inde : pays de diversité. Un pays aux multiples facettes.

Autant un pays de biodiversité, qu'un pays d'aridité.

Autant un pays de résilience, que de refus de la fatalité.

L'Inde, un pays, un peuple d'hospitalité.

Où la rue vous accueille spontanément, un sourire sincère aux lèvres: *svaagat he!*

Excellence Dr Ralph Gonsalves, Premier Ministre de Saint-Vincent les Grenadines,

Madame Amina Mohammed, Vice-Secrétaire générale des Nations Unies,

Excellence, mesdames et messieurs les Ministres, in particular the CO13 President, Honorable Zhang Jialong

Mesdames et messieurs les chefs d'agence présents:

- L'administrateur du Programme des NU pour le Développement,
- La Directrice exécutive du Programme des NU pour l'environnement,
- La directrice exécutive du Fonds pour l'Environnement Mondial,
- Le directeur exécutif du Fonds Vert pour le Climat
- Ma chère collègue Secrétaire exécutive de la Convention sur la Diversité Biologique,
- Rene Castro Salazar, Sous-secrétaire général, FAO
- Cher Ovais Sarmad, Secrétaire exécutif adjoint de la convention Climat
- Chers collègues des NU, de la Banque mondiale,
- Pradeep Monga, Secrétaire exécutif adjoint de la Convention des Nations Unies sur la lutte contre la désertification

Monsieur le Ministre de l'environnement, des forêts et du changement climatique de l'Inde, Prakash Javadekar: merci d'être, avec votre équipe, un hôte si généreux. Votre hospitalité a attiré 8500 participants. Jamais une COP de UNCCD n'a attiré autant de délégués et de leaders. L'atmosphère est collégiale et cordiale. Je vous prie de vous joindre à moi pour remercier notre pays hôte l'Inde

**Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,**

**Dear participants,**

The UNCCD staff in Bonn recently celebrated the arrival of the newest member of the Secretariat's family.

Our colleague Omer and his wife Başak, had just welcomed their new daughter Defne into the world.

For sure, the two parents will do their utmost to ensure a bright future for Defne. Yet, the future of a child is not in the hands of the parents alone, but of humanity at large.

This reminds me of Kofi Annan's Nobel Lecture, where he reflected on the life ahead for a young girl born in Afghanistan on that day.

- It wasn't a future any one of us would want for a child.
- A life, centuries, rather than miles, away from her peer group in wealthy nations.
- And, nearly 20 years later, I'm not sure the outlook has really changed.

So, given our 25 years anniversary theme of 'Growing The Future *Together*', it made me wonder:

- What can we achieve today, to justify their confidence in us?
- To ensure that 25 years from *now*, the children born today will see their families growing up in a safe, prosperous and equitable society?
- Where that young girl is a reminder of how far we have *come*, not how far we have to *go*.

There is no escaping the powerful timing of this COP.

On one hand, we've just had the IPCC report laying out the science of why the connections between land, climate and biodiversity can either threaten or strengthen human wellbeing.

On the other, we're just about to have the five UN summits in New York laying out options to get back on target for climate change and the Sustainable Development Goals.

So, the agreements we reach here:

- About how to restore, protect and manage our land on a massive scale,
- And how to trigger a seismic shift in private sector partnerships to make it happen,
- Can immediately help ramp up the ambition of action plans for everyone involved.

As land is one of the biggest carbon sinks available, we must use this window of opportunity to make more stakeholders realize that:

- Even beyond a financial return of as much as 30-to1 for restoration,
- Or social return from millions of jobs in energy, technology, tourism or agriculture,

- Any investment in land creates a whole range of spillover benefits to fuel that cycle.

For example, restoring 350 million hectares of degraded land by 2030 could generate US\$9 trillion in ecosystem services and sequester up to 26 gigatons of greenhouse gases.

Nice numbers. But what do they actually mean for people around the world?

For herders on the rangelands in Jordan and Egypt, they mean reinstating traditional land management that stabilizes incomes and reduces conflict.

- For tea growers in Vietnam, China, India and Sri Lanka, they mean using natural fertilization and pest control to transform their plantations from red stumps to robust yields.

- For rice farmers in Madagascar, they mean swapping slash and burn monoculture for a basket of techniques that could see their crops diversify and grow by 40%.
- And for ranchers in the Tropical Andes, they mean using pasture rotation, biogas and water systems to improve the health of the meadows, the biodiversity and the cattle - even doubling their milk production.

What's more, all those projects have 3 things in common.

1. First, **women** are equally involved in the decisions, implementation and benefits, whether that's through greater financial security, stronger land rights, new skills or simply not having to walk for hours to get water.
2. Second, those examples are all projects the Global Environment Facility is delivering through **partnerships**

with governments, NGOs, scientists, local communities and our sister agencies across the UN.

3. And third, leveraging that inclusive and collaborative approach will see both the reach and the pace of change **scaled up** dramatically.

- Especially if we can align them with some of the ambitious cooperation programmes already taking root, such as:
  - the Initiative 2020 in Latin America and the Caribbean,
  - the Great Green Wall of Africa,
  - or the Green Belts of China and India to name just a few.

Ladies and gentlemen, combining our land with those three little concepts of equality, partnerships and scale could take us a very long way towards our common goals.

Just a year into this century, Kofi Annan's remarks acknowledged that we were '*already violently disabused of any hopes that progress towards global peace and prosperity is inevitable.*'

When he asked us to confront it, we nodded, applauded and carried on as before.

So, by the time that young girl he spoke of reached her teens:

- We had degraded over a fifth of our land,
- Putting climate change and poverty on a fast track with inequality and insecurity.

Today, as she reaches adulthood, perhaps with a daughter of her own, we have a chance:

- Not only to reverse that trend by restoring the two billion hectares of land available and achieving land degradation neutrality.
- But also, to extract every last drop of the benefits that transformation offers for people everywhere, from jobs and security, to health and education.

Defne is the newest member of the UNCCD family, so I'm sure you understand why we are a little protective of her future.

In fact, with 250 babies born every *minute*, I know:

- That *each* of you feels the same about someone, somewhere.

- That we *all* want to see them growing together in a world where every child has an equal chance.
- And that *every* investment in land will unlock opportunities to bring that world closer to reality.

Which is why I also know we *will* ensure this *COP*

- makes global peace and prosperity
- more achievable, if not yet inevitable.

Perhaps making it inevitable can be our challenge for next time!

**Bahut dhanyavad.** Thank you.