

**25**  
YEARS



**United Nations**  
Convention to Combat  
Desertification



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**Closing Speech**

**Ibrahim Thiaw, UNCCD Executive Secretary**

**CLOSING SESSION**

**New Delhi, 13 September 2019**

Minister Javadekar, COP 14 President

Excellencies,

Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Mahatma Gandhi once said:

***“Honest disagreement is often a good sign of progress”.***

Over the last two (2) weeks, there has been plenty of honest disagreements. I know there have been some hot debates.

But I am delighted to report that we have seen very good progress on all our areas of work; to strengthen our

Convention, to better support the Parties and, above all, to produce better results for the people we serve.

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi rightly said at the Opening Ceremony of this COP, “everything has a law of being, a

purpose, and everybody has to fulfill a purpose.” And this is precisely what we did here at COP 14.

Let me begin by, once again, congratulating our new President of COP 14, His Excellency Mr. Prakash Javadekar, Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change of India. He and I have had good discussions in recent months about our shared hopes for this Conference. Those hopes have been surpassed in every account! I would like to express our gratitude to the Government and people of India.

Excellency, we have no doubt the Convention is in very capable hands. Your experience, your vision, and your wisdom are recognized by all of us that have had the privilege to know you. In the coming two (2) years, we look forward, under your able presidency, to continue to walk together, to share together so that we can indeed make a future that is

more sustainable for all.

Mister President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please allow me to share with you **four** take-away messages:

**First:** we have sent a very clear message to the upcoming New York Summits: **investing in land unlocks multiple opportunities.**

Land restoration is one of the cheapest solutions to address the global crises of climate change and biodiversity loss and, ultimately, to meet the Sustainable Development Goals.

A global movement of restoration, anchored in Nature-based Solutions, would deliver benefits for the three (3) Rio Conventions and for many of the world's most pressing issues.

Our successes will be measured in more than biophysical terms. They will mean greater health and well-being for people everywhere and for the planet.

This leads me to my second take away: there is a clear **business case for land restoration.**

More opportunities will emerge as we build an even stronger business case for land restoration. That business case for investment in land and its restoration works for both you as Parties and the private sector.

At COP 14, we talked about the need for sustainable value chains. And the private sector invited you – among other things - to think about how to **regulate** in support of innovation for sustainable land management, and how to

develop incentive mechanisms that reward the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of natural resources.

**Third:** I think this is the COP when we finally put **drought** at the right level. We have woken up to the fact that we will see more frequent and severe droughts, a phenomenon that will be exacerbated by climate change.

Parties should be better prepared for drought, particularly through better mitigation and management of risks. The momentum started few years ago. Now we need to accelerate and come to long lasting options.

**Finally, to my mind, this was the COP where we put people at the heart of what we do.**

I was delighted, in particular, to see Parties embrace the need not only to talk about, but really deliver on the Gender Action Plan and youth engagement.

And adopt a decision on land tenure rights. With tenure right and better access to credit and technology for all land-users - women and men– we can, in the years to come, see this Convention deliver real impact. At scale.

Mister President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to close by saying:

- Thank you all for being here. For your flexibility and for your willingness to compromise and drive this agenda in a positive direction. I hope you would agree with me that this COP has been simply excellent! Many participants say it has been a turning point.

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- Running such a large COP flawlessly could not have happened without the generosity and the unwavering support from our host country, India. I am still reflecting as to which of the following touched me the most: (i) the kindness of Indian people, (ii) the quality of the cuisine or (iii) the enthusiasm and spirit of the local organizing committee. Mister President: please convey our deepest gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to the Government and people of India! Allow me to put on record our sincere thank you to all volunteers, interns, security officers, technicians and many others who have worked tirelessly, in the background, sometimes even un-noticed, but whose contributions have been critical for the success of COP 14. Can I ask the room to please

express its gratitude to the organizing committee? They deserve a round of applause!

- My sincere thanks also go to our UN colleagues who came from Arusha, Bangkok, Nairobi, New York, Geneva, and Vienna, for your hard work, camaraderie and dedication.
- Finally, allow me to pay tribute to UNCCD staff for their extraordinary dedication and professionalism. I measure and appreciate all the efforts, enthusiasm, imagination and diplomatic skills each of you has put in this process. I also value the intellectual contribution all of you have provided at different stages while preparing for the COP 14, and during the various meetings and events. Your professionalism embodies the UNCCD philosophy and your hard work is a prime example of how we can

further the land degradation neutrality agenda. Can I ask all UNCCD staff to please rise?

Ladies and Gentlemen, please join me in congratulating and thanking them! They also deserve a big round of applause.

COP 14 is over. For us, it is not the end. Our work begins!

On the road to the Climate Action Summit, UNFCCC COP 25 and the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, let us keep the momentum and build stronger partnerships.

Thank you for all you have done to make COP 14 such an effective forum, and for being such strong advocates of land.

We did demonstrate that investing in land, can and does, unlock opportunities, not only for ecosystems but most

importantly for human kind, for our little *Defne* and all her sisters and brothers around the world.

Bahut dhanyavad!

Thank you!

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