

25
YEARS



United Nations
Convention to Combat
Desertification



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Opening Speech

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Civil Society Organizations (CSO) Pre-Meeting

New Delhi, 1st September 2019, 15.00, Room MET-13

Welcome to India. Namaste.

A lot of people come to India to find themselves. But the Mahatma Gandhi said: *“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”*

Much of my life, I was working with NGOs. So, I appreciate, perhaps more than most, the vital role you play on issues of environment and development. I appreciate, fully, that many of you have committed your lives to the service of others. That is, globally, the most vulnerable populations. You will be important allies again during these next two weeks.

People are angry. Land degradation jeopardizes the ability of the most vulnerable to feed their families. Threatens the survival of over a million species, drives forced migration and resource-related conflicts.

The IPCC special report on climate change and land, released just a few short weeks ago, reaffirms that the increasingly global flows of consumption and production means that what we eat and consume in one country can impact land [and by extension the survival of ecosystems and people] in another.

We live in truly interconnected times. And we have some important choices to make.

In the last few years, the environmental movement [linked I have to say to the climate emergency] has done society a great service. By pushing public opinion. Most recently with the Extinction Rebellion and the Fridays for Future movements.

We could be at a moment of radical change. But can we expect to see a paradigm shift in the way we live and consume? Will it be enough to make the choices and trade-offs that protect and rehabilitate the land everywhere?

The success of this Convention and its ability to be part of radical change will depend on several elements. And the full and committed involvement of the non-governmental community is going to be paramount.

To quote Gandhi again. *“In a gentle way, you can shake the world”*.

Firstly, civil society ensures effective policy making and the goodwill/compliance of the private sector!

Secondly, work undertaken by CSOs in general - and the CSO panel in particular - has brought strategic policy issues to the attention of the Parties. Long may this continue – we welcome your good ideas!

Chief among these is land tenure. If all goes well, it is likely to be the big win of COP 14. Parties are keen to find a clear, operational decision on land tenure at this meeting. And it was civil society that got this ball rolling 3 years ago. Civil society

rightly recognized that land rights are the *elephants in the room* when it comes to protecting and rehabilitating the land. Ensuring responsible land governance will be a critical step forward if we want to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality.

Thirdly, NGOs who work at community level are strategically placed to provide the interface between Governments and local populations.

I trust CSOs will spare no effort in making sure the voice of local people is heard at COP. It is my ambition that COP14 goes beyond the biophysical implications of land degradation and focuses on the people. The health and well-being of 3.2 billion people is directly or indirectly impacted by desertification and land degradation.

Local communities, indigenous peoples, men, women, youth have real needs and powerful opinions about their resource rights, rural-urban planning and land management decisions. Please amplify their voices.

The reverse is also true. People everywhere, in both developed and developing countries, must be made aware of the significance of protecting the land. So, I hope you will take the message back that implementing this Convention will not only deliver benefits in terms of improving their immediate environment and quality of life. But will help solve pressing global problems that concern them - such as food security, migration, conflict, climate change and loss of biodiversity. Please, mainstream the outcomes of this COP into your work.

During the next two weeks, you will have the opportunity to interact with decision makers and provide your input into about 30 decisions.

COP14 is aiming to help countries achieve Land Degradation Neutrality and mitigate the effects of drought by delivering tools and resources that are fit for purpose. Tools that are built on accurate and reliable science and data, participatory processes and that benefit everyone.

Beyond that and apart from the decision on tenure; I hope to see clear outcomes on climate/biodiversity synergies; drought; restoration; sand and dust storms and gender. It should also be

the COP where we start to see how all our plans and policies can deliver real action and impact.

I really hope that the energy and enthusiasm that I can feel in this room will be channeled into the discussions and negotiations during the next two weeks. Count on me and my team to help you materialize your good ideas.

I certainly count on you. I also thank you for your support – and service to others - during the first 25 years of the Convention. I wish all of us a fruitful and constructive meeting.

Let's shake the world.
