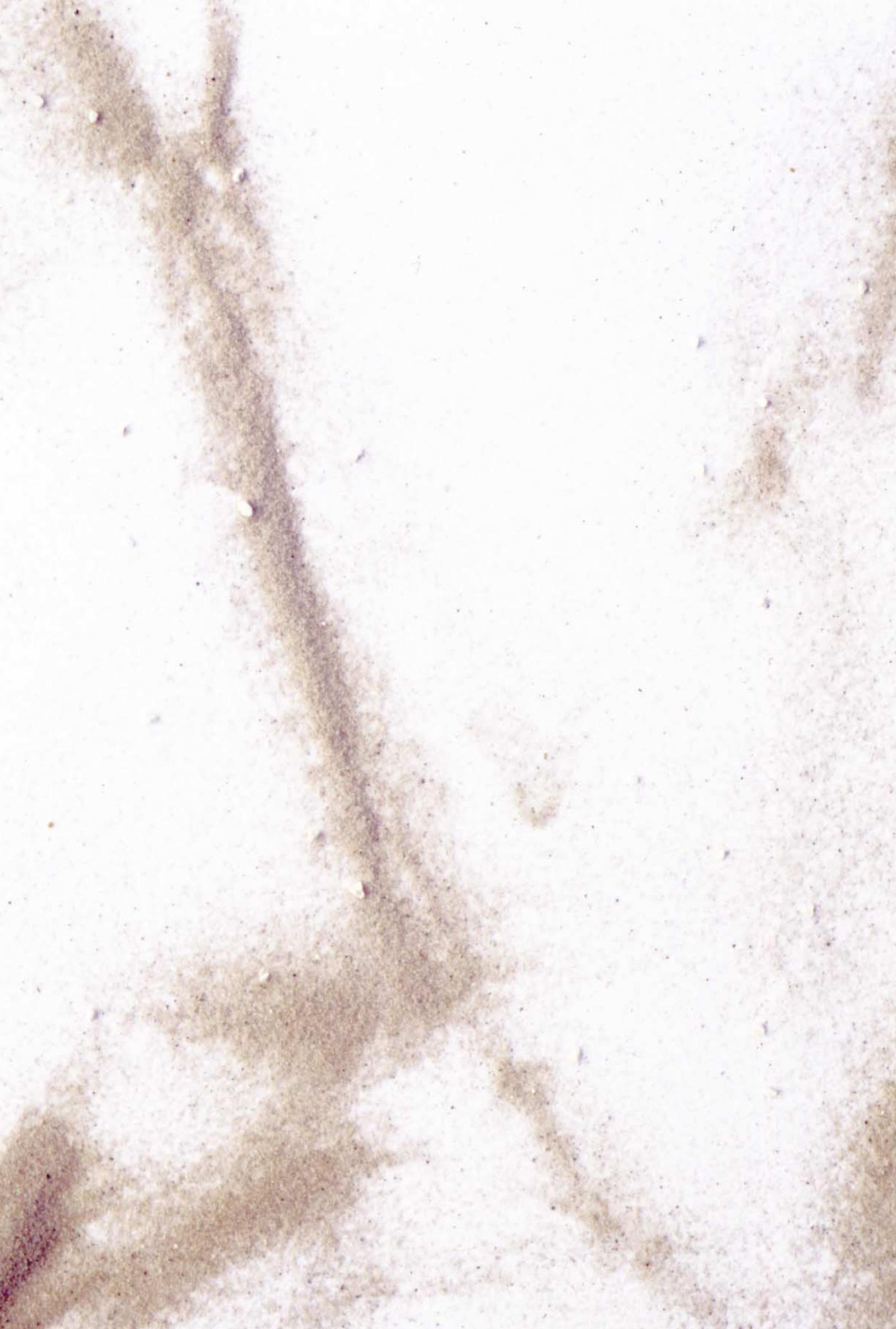


Preserving our common ground

UNCCD

10 years on

Preserving our common ground
UNCCD
10 years on



Preserving our common ground

UNCCD

10 years on

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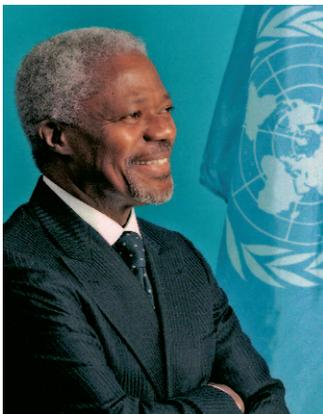
The 10th anniversary publication of the
United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) plays a key role in the world's efforts to eradicate poverty, achieve sustainable development and reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is the only internationally recognized legally binding instrument that addresses the problem of land degradation in dryland rural areas. It enjoys a truly universal membership of 191 parties. And, through the Global Environment Facility (GEF) as its funding mechanism, it is able to channel much-needed resources to projects aimed at combating the problem, particularly in Africa.

The risks of desertification are substantial and clear. Desertification undermines the fertility of the world's land, with productivity losses reaching 50 percent in some areas. It contributes to food insecurity, famine and poverty, and can give rise to social, economic and political tensions that can cause conflicts, further poverty and land degradation. Current estimates are that the livelihoods of more than one billion people are at risk from desertification, and that, as a consequence, 135 million people may be in danger of being driven from their land. The rural poor, especially in the developing world, are especially vulnerable. Indeed, recognizing the urgent need to address the far-reaching implications of this problem, the UN General Assembly has declared 2006 the International Year of Deserts and Desertification.

On the tenth anniversary of the Convention's adoption, I congratulate all the stakeholders for making possible the achievements of the past decade, and encourage them to confirm and strengthen their commitment to the UNCCD process. I look forward to working with Governments, civil society, the private sector, international organizations and others to focus attention on this crucial issue, reverse the trend of desertification and set the world on a safer, more sustainable path of development that benefits all the world's people.

Kofi Annan
UN Secretary-General



At a time when climate change is worsening the problems of drought and desertification for a billion people living in the arid and semi-arid areas of our planet, two words summarize the situation: gravity and urgency.

This is why it is fortunate that at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the international community paid particular attention to the problems related to desertification and committed to create a specific instrument to address it.

Ever since the conception of the UNCCD, Switzerland has acknowledged its great importance and provided to it much support. Such a support should not decrease in the future.

For the past ten years, the UNCCD has been both an indispensable forum and instrument put at the disposal of the international community to address the increasing loss of fertile lands and biomass and the effects of drought.

In addition to its political and formal character, an international convention must also be a means of expression of solidarity between countries and actors at various levels. In this sense, the UNCCD has succeeded from the beginning in appropriately channeling attention towards highlighting the role of local populations and the work of NGOs.

By granting a particular importance to traditional knowledge, the UNCCD has highlighted the pragmatism and ingenuity of dryland communities who managed for centuries to draw their means of existence from arid and semi-arid ecosystems.

The identification of desertification indicators, the promotion of the establishment of desertification monitoring and evaluation systems and the prevention of famine by means of early warning systems are all activities for which the UNCCD stimulated exchange and the dissemination of vital information in the regions most concerned.

Above all, however, it is by placing at the heart of the debate the very populations that are primarily affected by desertification that the UNCCD brings true hope for a solution.

Policies and national action plans can indeed contribute to relevant actions on the ground. But it is only by taking into full consideration local populations' initiatives and empowering them with real responsibility that a true change in the degradation of natural resources can be secured. It is only on the basis of such legitimacy that the real conditions of an optimized local level management can be achieved.

The Sahel is one of the most affected areas by desertification. However, the political evolution of this region appears to favorably promote the emergence of enabling conditions for efficiently combating desertification.

Indeed, the process of decentralization in the Sahel provides a suitable framework within which local populations should be able to assume responsibility for local affairs.

Reversing a global trend

Kofi Annan
UN Secretary-General

The UNCCD: an indispensable instrument responding to a spreading problem

Micheline Calmy-Rey
*Federal Councillor,
Chief of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs,
Switzerland*

Following the series of national conferences and the end of autocratic regimes, the Sahel is moving towards a process of democratization that also concerns the field of natural resources management.

In those countries where decentralization is fairly advanced, certain competences, including those relating to natural resources management, are transferred to the municipalities. This exchange creates an opportunity to reinforce cooperation between these structures and the traditional institutions such as village and land chiefs and water masters.

Indeed, a better recognition on the part of the new communities of the indigenous practices of natural resources management, and of their logic, constitutes a factor that can contribute to real progress in terms of control and protection.

Directly affected by the degradation of their natural environment, but also armed with long experience, the Sahelian populations are in a position to propose real solutions for the sustainable management of their ecosystem.

Desertification affects the lives of millions of people, and in particular the rural poor. Unlike other global environmental problems, desertification is unfortunately of little interest to the business community. One may well deplore the fact that in many areas, the loss of productive ecosystems is regarded neither as a factor contributing to degradation of the national capital nor as a threat to domestic food security.

In spite of this, after ten years of existence, the UNCCD can be proud of the tangible progress it has allowed the international community to achieve in terms of awareness raising, analysis and information sharing.

By openly valorizing the fundamental role of local communities affected by drought and the degradation of natural resources, the UNCCD greatly contributes to the debate on reassessing such communities' unique decision-making capacity. This is by all means a debate that lies at the center of the *problematique* of combating desertification.

Micheline Calmy-Rey
Federal Councillor,
Chief of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs,
Switzerland



Promoting progress in the Sahel

The adoption of the UNCCD on June 17, 1994 was a major step forward in the process of mobilizing the world against the threat of desertification. The commemoration of the tenth anniversary of this event provides me with the opportunity to extend, on behalf of the country members of the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), my best wishes to the secretariat of the Convention on its achievements.

The UNCCD exemplifies a force of intense activity in sensibilizing the world on the environmental threats facing our planet. At the same time, it symbolizes the will of the international community to combine efforts to respond to the degradation of natural resources in arid and semi-arid regions.

In its preamble, the Convention clearly emphasizes the interdependency of the factors responsible for desertification by specifying, "desertification and drought affect sustainable development through their interrelationships with important social problems such as poverty, poor health and nutrition, lack of food security, and those arising from migration, displacement of persons and demographic dynamics".

In the Sahel, this scenario is particularly evident. Weakened by an endemic drought, its ecosystem is deteriorating under the increasing pressure of the people that depend on the region's natural resources for their survival. Human impact coupled with unstable climatic conditions accentuates the degradation of the land and negatively affects the living conditions of people in rural communities. This complex situation led the member countries of the CILSS to adopt an integrated development approach that is focused on addressing desertification and eradicating poverty.

In spite of their limited means, the Sahelian countries have national and regional programmes in place that bring to life the commitments outlined within the framework of the UNCCD. These states have initiated innovative methods at the technical and institutional levels to combat desertification and the effects of drought. This was made possible by broad education campaigns intended to foster a culture of sustainable development.

We have closely followed the Convention's implementation process from the beginning, as it is the supporting structure to the activities we carry out. We are pleased with the progress achieved in defining finance and support mechanisms. But the severity of the problems facing the countries of the Sahel require a more consistent mobilization of international solidarity to support this region in combating desertification.

At the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, countries from the North and South made many commitments to reverse the degradation of the environment. It is imperative, in our eyes, to put these commitments into concrete actions on the ground.

Promoting Progress in the Sahel

H.E.M. Maouiya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya
President of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania,
President of the Permanent Interstate Committee
for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS)

Today, the convention is in full force and has progressed remarkably. This anniversary must constitute a time to evaluate what has been achieved in the course of the past decade if we are to meet the mandate its adoption set forth.

H.E.M. Maouiya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya

*President of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania
President of the Permanent Interstate Committee
for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS)*



Desertification is a global problem that directly affects 250 million people worldwide and a third of the earth's land surface. Because it undermines the land's productivity, it is directly linked with food security in the drylands and sustainable development. It threatens the livelihoods of some 1.2 billion people who depend on the land for most of their needs, forcing them to migrate to urban centres or foreign lands in search of a better life.

Despite the severity of the threat, not only in Africa, but throughout the world, and its dire consequences on human welfare, desertification was not addressed by the international community as a global economic, social and environmental problem until the late 1970s, after more than 200,000 people died in the Sahel from drought and desertification. It was not until the governments called on the UN General Assembly to set up an intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to prepare for a legally binding instrument on desertification at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit that a truly universal Convention to address desertification came to be established in June 1994.

As such, its adoption marks a turning point in the international process towards the definition of a global sustainable development agenda, and for the people of the drylands it certainly constitutes a remarkable accomplishment. To help these people, the Convention has since marched onward with the twin missions of protecting the environment and alleviating poverty in the drylands. It works based on the principles of participation, partnership and decentralization – the backbone of good governance. Its efforts to advocate a spirit of partnership, as the basis upon which the states affected by desertification and donor countries should conduct their relations and its bottom-up approach, have proven to be highly effective, especially in empowering and consolidating the participation of communities directly affected by desertification. With this in mind, the Convention is an outstanding example in its innovative approach, and we are now seeing the fruits of the efforts made at all levels in the past ten years.

As we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention, it is even more encouraging to learn that the implementation of the Convention will be further propelled with the designation of the GEF as a financial mechanism of the Convention in 2003. As a result, the replication of successful experiences is expected to be expedited and strengthened with more people benefiting from its outreach.

The Convention has clearly proven that desertification and the threats it poses do not constitute insurmountable challenges, but are ones that can be overcome. However, only and when people are committed to the process will desertification no longer engulf us. In this regard, I would like to encourage the international community to continue to support this unique convention.

Maurice Strong
Former UNCED Secretary-General



Increased global commitment needed to tackle desertification

Maurice Strong
Former UNCED Secretary-General

It is hard to believe that ten years have passed since the birth of the UNCCD. When the interim secretariat to this Convention was first established, our mandate was broad, but our mission clear – to assist countries in their combat against desertification and the effects of drought in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid ecosystems.

Fast forward to 2004 and one can see that the Convention has come a long way. Within ten years, we have accomplished many feats and faced great challenges. Today, not only is the Convention the only legally binding instrument specifically conceived to combat desertification, it is also one of the most successful environmental Conventions to come out of the 1992 Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro.

Besides its strength in numbers, the Convention is now recognized as an invaluable partner and a prime tool to address the land degradation-poverty nexus. As such, it is regarded as a crucial instrument for meeting the MDGs. Highlighted in the 2003 Human Development Report, soil degradation affects nearly two billion hectares of land and the lives of some one billion people living on the drylands. Without fertile soils and the tools for sustainable land management, the people in these regions will not break the cycle of poverty, thus leaving the MDGs unfulfilled.

Since entering into force in 1996, the Convention has provided a unique enabling framework to a wide range of development partners, including local, national and regional governments and NGOs. These partners implement projects targeted at curbing desertification and drought by fully involving the prime stakeholders, that is, the most affected communities.

Where past initiatives failed by not involving local groups, the Convention has done the opposite by substantiating one of its founding principles: the Participative Approach. Pastoralists, farmers, women's groups and entire communities participate in activities ranging from educating children on desertification to planting drought resistant shrubs to act as barriers against advancing sand dunes. These tangible projects improve the lives of people in the regions devastated by desertification. Even as you are reading this, projects are under way in Cape Verde, Mauritania, Niger, India, China, Argentina and elsewhere in the world where desertification, drought and other forms of land degradation are disrupting the way of life for millions of people.

Protecting livelihoods and safeguarding the future for generations to come is at the very centre of the Convention. With last year's establishment of the GEF as a financial mechanism to the Convention, a strengthened framework of intervention has been secured for implementation of new projects and initiatives.

In the past, the lack of financial support hampered the efforts of many developing countries from carrying out national plans to combat desertification. Today, GEF's presence can be seen in Africa, Asia and Latin America through initiatives

aimed at promoting sustainable land management practices that are adapted to reflect the environmental, economic and social aspects of each region.

Beyond signatures, projects and funding mechanisms, there is a vital component of the Convention that lies at the root of the successes we have encountered in the last ten years. It is the people of the world's drylands. It is their commitment to the objectives of the Convention and their daily struggle for sustainable development that constitute the best guaranty for our common success. Without these people, we would not be in the position to reflect on the past and plan for the future.

In two years, we will come together to celebrate the International Year of Deserts and Desertification. I encourage all countries to establish national committees to organize and plan activities surrounding the year's theme. Through this international platform, we hope to heighten awareness of desertification, the work of the Convention and its partners, the seriousness of the issue and the challenges ahead.

We have to remember that while much has been accomplished since 1994, our work is not finished. Yes, we are making progress, but just as fast as one success is counted, there are many challenges still facing us. Securing increased funding and raising in-country support are examples of what remains to be done. Thankfully, I know it is not a task beyond our means, as we have ten years of experience to prove otherwise.

In closing, I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to everyone involved, past and present, in the UNCCD process. Let us now focus on working together to ensure that the next ten years exceed our goals and bring our mandate closer to fruition.

Hama Arba Diallo
UNCCD Executive Secretary



A decade of progress, a movement for change

Hama Arba Diallo
UNCCD Executive Secretary

Desertification is the degradation of the land in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climate change and human activities. However, beyond the cold technicalities of such wording lies a chilling reality. To the millions of people living with the effects of desertification, it can simply mean having no food to eat, no land to till, no place to call home.

The impact of desertification can be seen all over the world, be it in the Sahel, Asia, Mesoamerica, across the Caribbean, throughout North America or along the Mediterranean. Soil degradation affects some two billion hectares of land and the livelihoods of up to one billion people living on the drylands.

When considering these numbers and the breadth of desertification, an increased global response must take place. The UNCCD is the legal instrument established in 1994 to answer this call. With 191 country parties, the Convention is one of the most successful legally binding treaties to come out of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. Within a decade, the Convention has brought the issue of desertification and other forms of land degradation to the forefront of the earth's pressing environmental concerns.

Ten years after its adoption, the Convention appears more than ever as a unique instrument put at the disposal of the international community to effectively address acute social, economic and political issues intrinsically linked to soil erosion, drought and desertification. However, the effectiveness of this response remains dependent on the commitment and willingness of the international community to implement the tools provided by the Convention.

Irrigation channels bring water to areas devastated by drought.



Rooftops have become a playground for many children in the Sahel, as advancing deserts sweep over existing settlements.



Securing a global common good



Planting drought resistant shrubs and building sand barriers are effective solutions to preventing land degradation.



At the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, the UNCCD was highlighted as a key player in meeting the poverty eradication targets – halving extreme poverty by 2015 – of the Millennium Development Goals.



Eradicating poverty, working towards a global equity equilibrium

Food insecurity and environmental degradation are inherently linked. When people are forced to take from the land as a means of survival, sustainable land practices are not a priority. With no arable land to grow crops or raise livestock, many have no choice but to leave and resettle in a more fertile area.

It is no surprise then to learn that two-thirds of the world's hungry people live in rural areas of developing countries. As highlighted in the 2003 Human Development Report, about half live in farm households on marginal lands where environmental degradation threatens agricultural production.

To address this strategic poverty-desertification nexus, the Convention's approach requires the full and effective involvement of local communities in the decision-making and project implementation processes. Without the involvement of farmers, pastoralists and entire villages, enduring and effective changes needed to address poverty and fight desertification would not be possible.

Utilizing the Convention to speak to their plight would mean tackling poverty in the affected regions. By increasing the incomes of the poor, it is possible to foster national and regional economic stability. This involvement could be a contribution towards the much needed global equity equilibrium.

The Convention's Conference of the Parties (COP) and its subsidiary bodies also work to build up a policy consensus and mobilize a coalition of partners to bring about a higher level of priority for the integrated management of land and water. In doing so, particular attention is given to the sustainable livelihoods of the lower income users of natural resources.

Eradicating poverty, working towards a global equity equilibrium

Many of the factors that lead to desertification often carry the seeds of potential conflicts. In fragile ecosystems, already characterized by a high level of natural resources vulnerability, lack of and competition for resources can constitute a major disruptive factor. Insufficient sources of water and loss of topsoil have become geo-strategic issues in many regions.

In Africa, for example, analysts reported a steady increase of conflicts fueled by disputes over scarce grazing land, as the result of severe desertification in the region. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is constantly monitoring these conflicts and points at alarming figures in terms of loss of human lives and forced migrations.

However, desertification is not only considered a security threat in Africa, but in many other countries, including outside of those regions commonly referred to as "drylands". In 2003, a NATO workshop was held in Valencia, Spain to address the threats posed by desertification in the Mediterranean. Experts at the workshop concluded that given the region's close proximity to Northern Africa, desertification could negatively impact food resources, people's health and the region's economy.

Today, many local projects include mechanisms for the prevention and settlement of conflicts linked to natural resources scarcity. Furthermore, to mitigate the negative socio-economic implications of desertification, the Convention works with country Parties in developing innovative approaches to avoid conflict. A pilot project launched in Lesotho to tackle desertification also spoke to the country's high youth unemployment rate and lack of HIV/AIDS education. More than 2,000 youth participants were involved in a number of projects such as tree planting, vegetable production, garbage collection and HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns. While not all activities focused directly on combating desertification, the results were lower unemployment rates and increased community involvement. These two factors alone can help alleviate the social strains that often lead to conflict and subsequent land degradation.

Overgrazing is one of the main forces contributing to desertification.



Preventing and settling land use conflict

Desertification and drought force people to leave their home in search of a better life. It is estimated that 135 million people – the combined populations of France and Germany – are at risk of being displaced by desertification. Some 60 million are expected to eventually move from the desertified areas of sub-Saharan Africa towards Northern Africa and Europe in the next 20 years. In North America, an estimated 700,000 to 900,000 Mexicans make their way every year into the US leaving behind their rural dryland homes to find a more prosperous life in the north.

The combined effects of drought and desertification force many villagers to spend hours in search of water. In many regions, sand covers once prosperous grazing lands and wells.



While freedom of movement is understood to be a consecrated principle of the most basic human rights, nobody should be forced to leave their home and ancestral land out of hunger or despair. In support of this, there is a growing consensus that people should have the right to stay in their communities.

Indeed, in the mid-90s, experts at a UNCCD international symposium on desertification and migrations concluded that the right to freedom of movement should be equal to the right to remain. No dryland community, no village in the Sahel or the Gran Chaco Americano, should be forced to face the grim prospect of leaving or disappearing. It is in the interest of their respective governments and the international community to provide the basic empowerment required to ensure their economic sustainability on their lands.

Many measures are available through the Convention to assist Parties in doing this. National Action Programmes (NAP), the main building block of the Convention, encourage developing countries to implement projects aimed at curbing desertification and drought before people are forced out of their homes. Activities include planting drought resistant crops, promoting alternative sources of energy and introducing economic incentives for the creation of small businesses to revitalize local economies.

Mitigating forced migration patterns: the freedom of movement and the right to remain

Air, water and soil are the three most basic elements indispensable to any form of life on the planet. They work in unison to support the very foundations of human existence. Yet, as essential as they may be, they are not always viewed in the same light.

Soil is often considered so abundant that it does not always receive the attention and protection it deserves, as air and water. Very few things though could be considered more erroneous than such a claim. Being vitally required by and directly beneficial to everyone, soil must be viewed as a global public good. Envisioning it in this way can have a tremendous impact on efforts to protect the earth's topsoil and combat desertification.

Fertile topsoil takes centuries to form, but it can be washed or blown away in a few seasons. From this stance, an accrued use of the Convention could promote fertile topsoil as a global public good and a common human patrimony to be preserved for future generations. The campaigns for other global goods, such as clean air and water, have assembled international cooperation and expertise to help protect these elements from environmental degradation and misuse.

Recognizing the work that remains to be done in raising the profile of soil conservation, the Convention provides the structure and an enabling framework for affected countries to work with land management experts to develop sustainable land use practices to conserve topsoil.

A market place in Mauritania engulfed in sand.



Drought is a silent killer. The great Sahelian drought and famine of 1968 to 1974 is a horrific reminder. In the span of six years, hundreds of thousands of people died and millions of animals perished. Images of starving children, dead livestock and desolate land quickly grabbed the world's attention and catapulted desertification centre stage. Under current projections of climate change, the hardship and human loss caused by drought could increase if its contributing factors are left unaddressed.

Through the Convention, an exchange of technical and scientific knowledge connects different regions of the world affected by desertification to prevent widespread droughts from taking root. In the past number of years, specialized meetings linking countries in Asia and Africa were organized to share knowledge on instruments to detect signs of drought and other forms of land degradation before leading to famine, mass migrations and conflict.

The Convention has created regional climatic programme networks to mobilize cooperation in addressing these challenges. It relies heavily on these subregional networks and organizations to implement early warning systems and undertake joint planning for mitigating the effects of drought, including measures to address the problems resulting from environmentally induced migrations.

Importance is also placed on encouraging national and local governments to develop disaster strategies that incorporate preparedness plans for other natural- and human induced catastrophes. Forest fires, floods, landslides and extreme temperatures can exacerbate desertification and drought. The 2003 heat wave in Europe and subsequent forest fires in Croatia, Portugal and Spain destroyed hundreds of thousands of hectares of land and increased each country's vulnerability to desertification. Responding to these events and subsequent humanitarian needs requires an all-encompassing approach to accelerate response times and reduce the impact on humans and the environment.

Deforestation contributes to the destructive forces of landslides.



Conserving soil as a common human patrimony

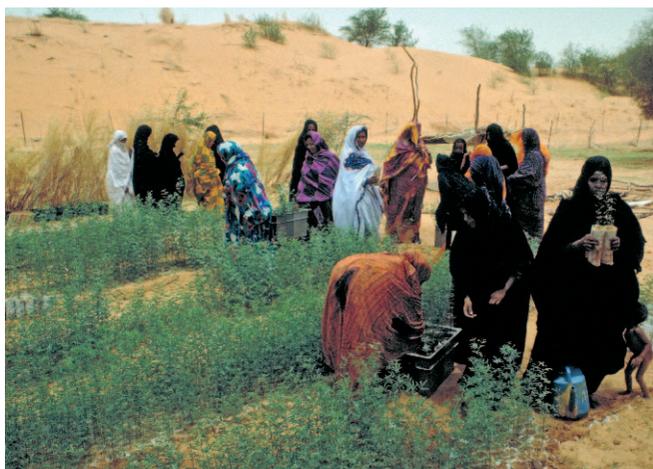
Responding to humanitarian action

Fostering strategic relationships is the backbone of the Convention. Where past failed efforts to combat desertification focused on mobilizing support at the upper-tiers of government, the Convention breaks the mold by targeting its actions through a bottom-up approach. People at the grass-roots level, development partners and governments cooperatively implement projects aimed at tackling land degradation. The Convention and its stakeholders realize people living off the land are the main source to help determine the best approach to manage their resources. By fully taking into consideration the principle of participative and bottom-up approaches promoted by the Convention, stakeholders can achieve great results within limited means.

In Shantumbu, Zambia, the Zambia Alliance of Women curbed rapid deforestation and land degradation by involving the entire community in finding alternative sources of energy and income for their households. Through the promotion of energy-efficient and environmentally friendly cooking stoves, indigenous forest areas are being preserved.

Likewise, the sharing of local knowledge and building cooperation among communities can produce positive results in promoting sustainable land use. One example can be found in Mongolia where nomadic herders came together to protect the environment and improve their living situation. The herders agreed to preserve winter pasture, engage in seasonal grazing, protect water sources and stop using bushes for fuel wood and, instead, rely on solar energy and dung stoves. Their united effort preserved pastureland, reversed deforestation and increased their living standards. The successful approach taken by these communities is now used as a model for Mongolia's response to desertification.

Women are encouraged to take a lead role in combating desertification and fostering sustainable development in their own communities.



Promoting democratic governance of natural resources

Following the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the international community was faced with implementing the Conventions on Biodiversity (CBD), Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Desertification. To address this concern, collaboration among the conventions was decided upon to coordinate activities and simplify the implementation of the treaties at the local, regional and national levels.

Twelve years after the Summit, the three Rio Conventions have forged a harmonized approach to assist developing countries in coordinating their national programmes to address the conventions. They are also working collectively to promote research and development, education, skills training and public awareness. To foster communication among the secretariats of the conventions, a joint liaison group was created in 2001.

The latest synergistic initiative among the Rio Conventions took place in April 2004 at a forest ecosystems management workshop in Italy. The workshop placed emphasis on sustainable forest management as a way to positively contribute to the mandates of all three conventions.

With last year's establishment of the GEF as a financial mechanism to the Convention, tackling land degradation and desertification through the Convention allows for more credible synergetic programme development with climate change and biodiversity across GEF's focal areas. This move is expected to propel the Convention's ability to assist affected developing countries in designing long-term oriented projects to combat desertification.

The Global Environment Facility Helping finance the future of the UNCCD

Founded in 1991, the GEF is a multilateral financial entity that provides financial assistance to help developing countries address environmental issues and foster a healthy global environment.

In 2003, the GEF was established as a financial mechanism of the UNCCD. This decision greatly strengthens the ability of developing countries to move forward with implementing the Convention.

To finance projects under the GEF, the GEF Assembly allocated \$500 million over a period of three years to carry out activities addressing land degradation.

The GEF projects focus on a number of areas including integrating sustainable land management into national development priorities and fostering partnerships with land users, organizations working on land management issues and stakeholders at all levels.

Forging synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements



Reforestation projects are underway throughout Asia to stop advancing sand dunes. In China, an estimated 28 per cent of its land is severely affected by desertification.

Advancing the Convention's mandate, spreading its potential

Combating desertification, the effects of drought and other forms of land degradation is an evolving task. One that changes continuously reflecting the many factors linked to desertification. The effects of desertification do not adhere to one region but are felt worldwide, thus the response must resonate this reality.

As the last decade has shown, combating desertification requires a multifaceted, innovative approach involving the cooperation of many parties, from developed countries to grassroots organizations. What must also be made clear, especially after the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, is the international community's role in bringing the Convention down to earth through the partnership-based implementation process.

The success of the Convention cannot be taken for granted, as it relies on the commitment of so many concerned agencies, stakeholders and partners. The secretariat depends on the continued support and understanding of everyone involved to heighten the momentum needed to combat land degradation and drought.

The worsening impact of climate change and other environmental factors are definitive obstacles threatening the Convention's efficacy. Still, the Convention stands strong and recognizes the effects of desertification can be reversed. The Convention can aptly respond to the many social, economic and political issues afflicting the world today. Yet, it cannot do so alone.

Advancing the Convention's mandate, spreading its potential

One distinguishing characteristic of the Convention is its vast and diverse network of development partners.

It is this mosaic of governments, international organizations and NGOs that bring about effective and substantial changes to the people most affected by desertification. Be it projects big or small, far-reaching or locally targeted, the Convention is shaped by the efforts of this network.

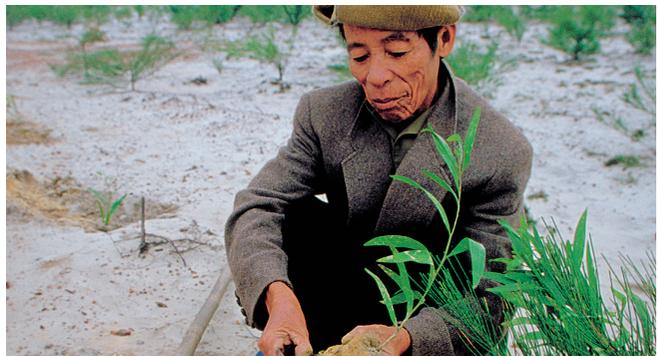
Through their actions, millions of land users and stakeholders are made aware of sustainable land use practices. They are also driven to explore many different avenues in combating desertification.

The Convention works with affected countries to develop disaster preparedness plans.



Gaining ground: the Convention at work

Degraded land can be rehabilitated and poverty tackled at the same time through the application of new methodologies that combine modern technology with traditional knowledge.



Desertification has a firm grip on China. With an estimated 28 per cent of its land affected by desertification, the livelihoods of 400 million people are at risk of being devastated.

Realizing this threat, the Chinese Government has responded with an innovative, multifaceted approach. While many large-scale activities are under way throughout the country, the government equally recognizes the benefit of smaller activities to combat desertification. One initiative encourages citizens to plant at least three trees a year to reclaim land devastated by erosion and stop advancing sand dunes. Furthermore, ownership of farmland has been transferred to many villagers in an attempt to create an increased sense of accountability.

Fostering change has also occurred in a small village in northern Ghana. Longer than expected dry seasons, bush fires, poor farming practices and overgrazing brought Wugulu close to a social and economic collapse. In 2000, the residents of the village made a commitment to change the way they used the land.

With the support of Friends of the Earth-Ghana and the Japan Fund for Global Environment, a tree planting and community woodlot project was launched to address deforestation caused by excessive felling of trees. In the end, some 2,000 acacia saplings were planted on 13 acres of land. Harvesting of the trees should begin in early 2005. Once under way, the villagers will have a sustainable source of trees for home use and income generating purposes. Similar projects are going on throughout the country, as word has spread on the village's success in preserving the environment and promoting economic stability.

Starting small, thinking big

Acting within and beyond one's borders: the experience of Italy

Italy has been playing a unique role in the negotiation and implementation of the Convention. As a developed and an affected country Party to the UNCCD, it serves a dual role by supporting other affected countries and responding to desertification in its own region.

Italy's level of involvement and cooperation with the UNCCD Secretariat was outlined in an agreement signed in early 2000. This framework included providing support to developing countries through capacity building, advocacy and catalytic activities. In particular, the Italian Cooperation has been assisting affected countries in the preparation and implementation of their NAPs to combat desertification, such as Niger.

The Italian Cooperation is also considering furthering its support to selected countries in Northern Africa and the Sahel within the framework of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). The initiative will support the implementation of NAPs, as well as sub-regional activities to combat desertification under the auspice of the Arab Magreb Union (UMA) and the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS). Other major bilateral partners and lending institutions are expected to contribute.

Beyond its actions abroad, Italy is working with other countries in the Mediterranean to respond to the threats posed by droughts, forest fires and land degradation. One specific example of its involvement is the Desertification Information System for the Mediterranean (DISMED) initiative. Under DISMED, Italy works with other affected countries in the region to adopt measures and policies for combating land degradation. The initiative aims to assess and monitor the extent, severity and trend of desertification and drought through a shared, common information system.

In 2003, Italy also signed an agreement with UNCCD to further promote cooperation among the three Rio Conventions. Afforestation pilot projects are underway in Argentina, China and Mozambique linking environmental conservation with improving the socio-economic situation in each country through the provisions of the Clean Development Mechanism of the UNFCCC. The projects will generate significant socio-economic benefits beyond pure carbon sequestration. In some cases, the projects will also contribute to reducing migration from unproductive areas, the illicit exploitation of natural forests and the practice of bush burning.

Clear-cutting increases soil's susceptibility to desertification.

The lack of fertile soil to grow crops and raise livestock threatens the livelihoods of Africa's drylands populations.

Acting within and beyond one's borders: the experience of Italy





Diversifying the UNCCD

Crucial to the successful implementation of the Convention is the inclusion of people and organizations representing different views and mandates.

Civil society and NGOs are prime examples of the diversity represented in the Convention. Both actors have been instrumental in the negotiation process, as they channel the voices of the people most threatened by drought and desertification. Acknowledging this contribution, the non-governmental community is part of the official programme of work of the Conference of the Parties (COP). To date, some 720 NGOs have been accredited with observer status to the COP.

Outside of the development realm, involving non-traditional groups is equally important. At COP 6 in Havana, Cuba, eminent artists and intellectuals came together for the first time to bring forward their views and ideas on the UNCCD process. They discussed the importance of recognizing arts and culture as a unique and innovative platform for addressing the issue of desertification.

At the same conference, youth delegates decided to make their voice resonate louder in tackling desertification. Recognizing the importance of involving this major constituency, the youth delegates invited others working with youth or on youth issues to contribute to an open meeting. In the end, the group ensured that specific contributions gathered through this networking were included in the final NGO statement and the declarations prepared by members of parliaments and NGOs, thus bringing the message of the youth to the international community.

To further the momentum realized at the conference, the group launched an interactive Web forum to provide youth from around the world with a platform to exchange their views on efforts to combat desertification, identify priority issues and lobby for increased action.

The rich history and culture of the drylands are at risk of being erased by desertification.

Combating desertification requires the full and effective involvement of everyone, from farmers to politicians alike.

Diversifying the UNCCD

Despite the best efforts of its country Parties, the UNCCD continues to face daunting challenges. Anthropogenic and climatic factors continue to test the resilience of ecosystems in vulnerable areas that host more than one billion people affected by poverty.

In this context, an organization is only as effective as its foundation: a solid base that keeps everything in check. For the UNCCD, the will of governments is at the root of the Convention. The secretariat acts as a support system and reference point so that such guidance flows into the UNCCD implementation process.

Established in 1999 by the UN General Assembly, the secretariat assists countries in discharging their responsibilities under the Convention and prepares for the sessions of the COP and its subsidiary bodies.

As the key decision-making body of the Convention, the COP meets on a biannual basis to review the implementation of the Convention, promote and facilitate the exchange of information, approve the budget and activity programmes of its subsidiary bodies and cooperate with international organizations, NGOs and other related conventions. As of 2004, there have been six COP sessions with the next to be held in 2005.

In addition to the COP, there are two subsidiary bodies where the services of the secretariat are of strategic significance for the implementation of the Convention. During COP 5 in 2001, delegates established a subsidiary body for implementation in the form of a Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) to analyze country national reports. Similar to a report card, national reports highlight the status of the Convention's implementation by Parties and observers. Parties also recognize the potential of the CRIC as a forum for substantial exchanges on implementation issues.

The Committee on Science and Technology (CST) provides the COP with the latest data and advice on scientific and technological matters related to combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought. Consisting of government representatives, the Committee identifies priorities for research and recommends ways of strengthening cooperation among researchers. Servicing the CST also enables the secretariat to discharge its monitoring function.

Considering desertification's global impact and its interdependency with environmental, social and economic factors, the secretariat facilitated collaborative arrangements to foster cooperation in addressing specific and regional issues. The Thematic Programme Network (TPN) and Regional Inter-regional Cooperation Network (RCN) Platforms (IRCP) work in unison with national governments and local organizations.

Regions under the Convention's Regional Implementation Annexes achieved progress in such areas as desertification monitoring and assessment, agro-forestry and soil conservation,



The Global Mechanism: an innovative approach to resource mobilization

Financially speaking, the costs associated with inaction in regards to desertification are estimated at one to three percent of developing countries' GDP. In most cases, investment in combating desertification is one order of magnitude below this amount.

With this in mind, the UNCCD established the Global Mechanism (GM) in 1997 to mobilize the financial and technical resources to support the implementation of the Convention.

The main function of the GM is to rationalize the allocation of existing aid. It acts as a hub for a dynamic network of partners, and seeks to accommodate the requirements and interests of all stakeholders involved. As such, the GM is a partnership builder that actively works on the interface between resources needed and resources available. In addition, it mobilizes supplemental funding with the aim of supporting governments to implement the Convention.

The GM recognizes that desertification is a cross-sectorial issue and deals with resources concerning the development process itself, particularly rural and agricultural development and poverty eradication. In response to these dimensions of the UNCCD, the GM acts as a broker that not only draws on, but also adds value to the interventions of other development parties.

Its strategy aims at creating a strong enabling environment through the principles of mainstreaming and partnership building. By investing resources to mainstream the Convention in development plans and strengthening multi-level partnerships, the GM seeks to generate a multiplier effect on its investments, resulting in greater resource flows both nationally and internationally.

With no blueprint for resource mobilization, the GM continuously evolves its approach to reflect the constraints and opportunities within each context. Recently, the GM has explored innovative funding approaches. It is engaging the private sector, exploring carbon financing, promoting debt conversion and improving its on-line database system to better collect and circulate information on resource mobilization.

Defining the process: the role of the UNCCD Secretariat

The Global Mechanism: an innovative approach to resource mobilization



Political recognition of the UNCCD is also fundamental for resource mobilization. An important and encouraging development was the recognition of the link between poverty and land degradation at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. The Convention was also highlighted as a key contributor towards reaching the poverty reduction targets of the MDGs.

Beyond increasing political awareness, challenges ahead include mainstreaming land degradation issues into the overall policy plans of both developing countries and development agencies and improving the coordination between donors, national focal points and ministries. Equally important is strengthening partnerships for more effective implementation of the Convention's objectives. The GM is ready to pursue these challenges and, through its unique role as a broker and catalyst, make a significant contribution to the UNCCD.

The host country: Germany's support to the UNCCD

As the host country to the UNCCD Secretariat, the German Government and the City of Bonn have provided the Convention with a home to carry out its function as a support system for the UNCCD implementation process.

Beyond providing the physical infrastructure, Germany has strategically attracted various other UN organizations in Bonn, such as the Conventions on Climate Change and Migratory Species. This proximity has allowed for increased collaboration and exchange on all levels. Moreover, it has fostered new relationships with other UN organizations. In 2003, the UN Volunteers programme and UNCCD launched a joint project in Cape Verde aimed at harnessing voluntary action to tackle youth unemployment and desertification. The fact that both organizations are housed in the same building exemplifies the importance of location and human interaction.

The host country: Germany's support to the UNCCD

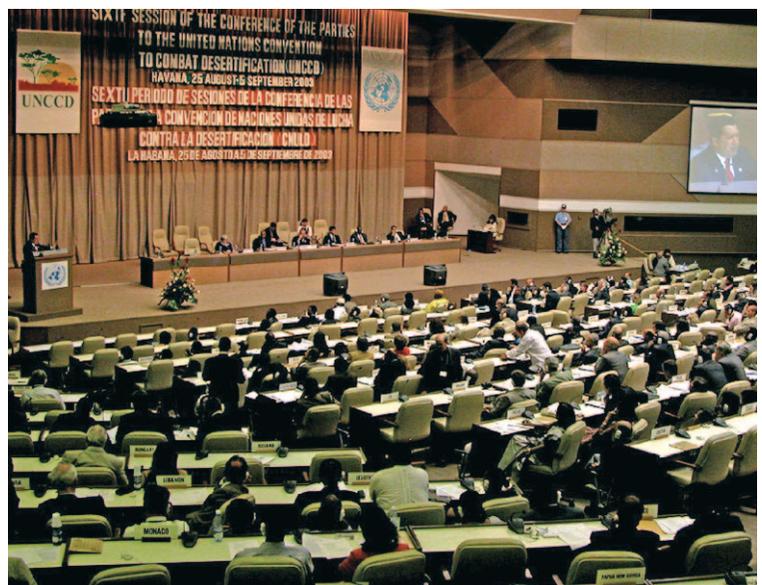
pasture management and sand dune fixation, natural resources mapping, remote sensing and early warning systems development, as well as the promotion of new and renewable energy sources and technologies.

Advocacy is another area of activity for the secretariat defined in decision 3/COP 6. In this capacity, it acts as an advocacy platform on desertification and other forms of land degradation with other UN organizations, the media and the public at large. It also promotes increased cooperation with the other Rio Conventions.

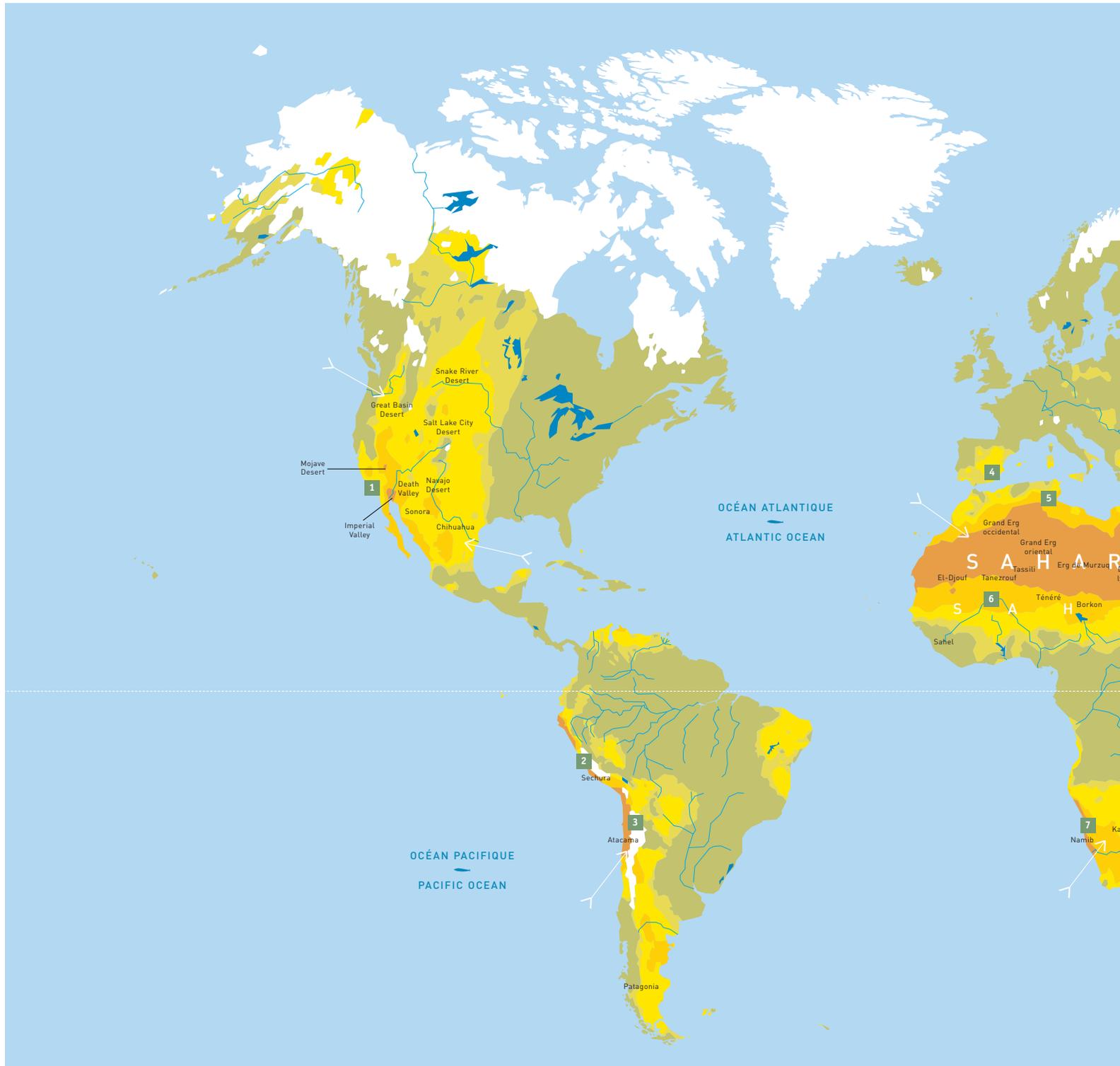
With 2006 designated the International Year of Deserts and Desertification, the secretariat will coordinate an extensive range of activities and initiatives to increase awareness of desertification and drought and strengthen the international community's response.

The role of the secretariat will continue to evolve, as countries begin to report the progress made in addressing desertification. Increased coordination will be required with stakeholders to ensure that lessons drawn from successes and challenges experienced in combating desertification are effectively shared for the collective benefit of the international community.

The COP is the key decision-making body of the Convention. As of 2004, there have been six COP sessions with the next to be held in 2005.



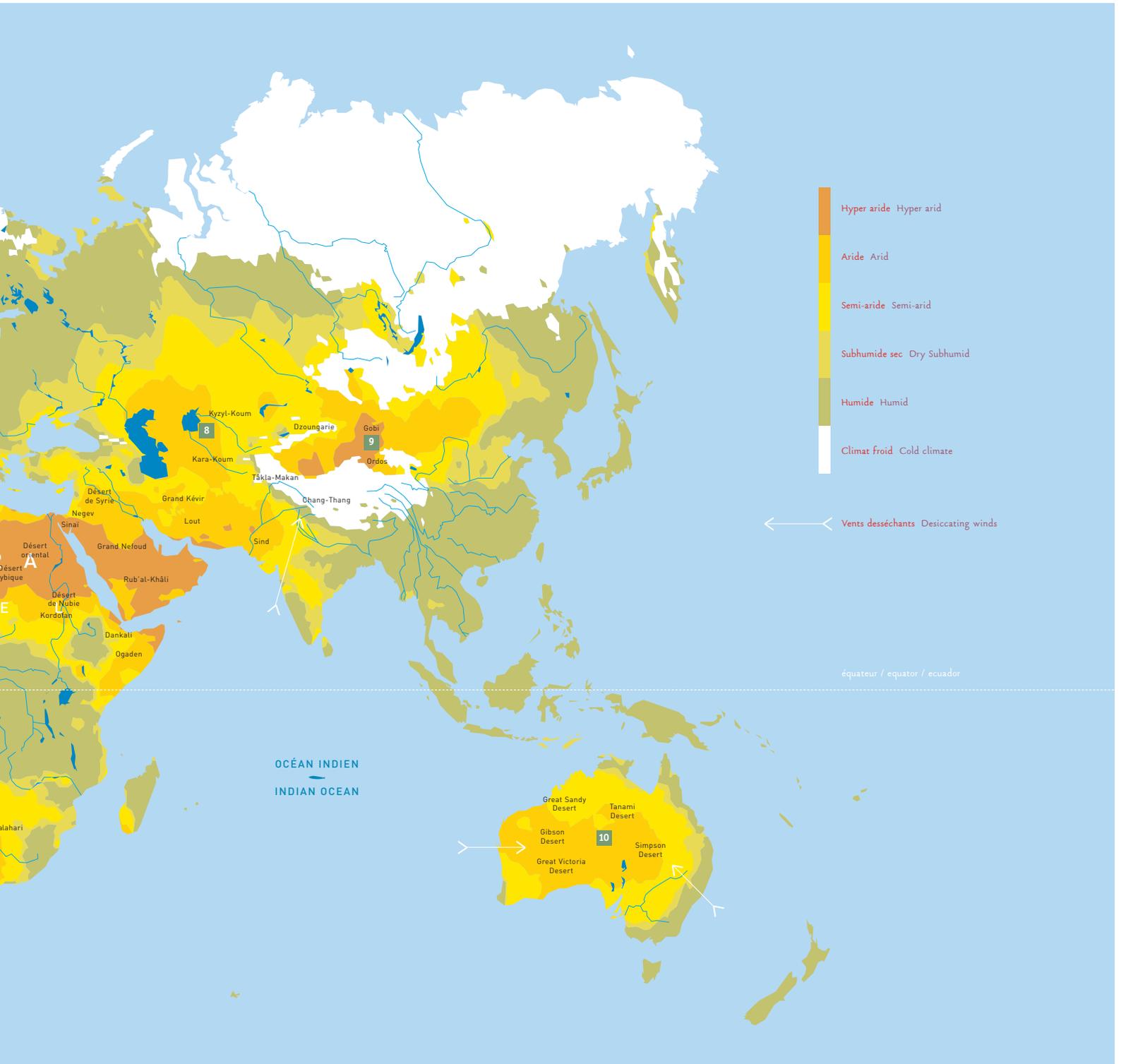
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|----------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Mexico 03/04/95 | 18. Sweden 12/12/95 | 35. Libyan Arab Jamahiriya 22/07/96 | 50. Chad 27/09/96 | 67. Cuba 13/03/97 | 84. Kenya 24/06/97 |
| 2. Cape Verde 08/05/95 | 19. Denmark 22/12/95 | 36. Oman* 23/07/96 | 51. Swaziland 07/10/96 | 68. Mozambique 13/03/97 | 85. Brazil 25/06/97 |
| 3. Netherlands 27/06/95 | 20. Switzerland 19/01/96 | 37. Bolivia 01/08/96 | 52. Nepal 15/10/96 | 69. Iran 29/04/97 | 86. Honduras 25/06/97 |
| 4. Egypt 07/07/95 | 21. Niger 19/01/96 | 38. Mauritania 07/08/96 | 53. United Kingdom 18/10/96 | 70. Greece 05/05/97 | 87. Madagascar 25/06/97 |
| 5. Senegal 26/07/95 | 22. Mauritius 23/01/96 | 39. Eritrea 14/08/96 | 54. Jordan 21/10/96 | 71. Barbados* 14/05/97 | 88. Malaysia 25/06/97 |
| 6. Ecuador 06/09/95 | 23. Bangladesh 26/01/96 | 40. Benin 29/08/96 | 55. Morocco 12/11/96 | 72. Namibia 16/05/97 | 89. Saudi Arabia* 25/06/97 |
| 7. Lesotho 12/09/95 | 24. Burkina Faso 26/01/96 | 41. Norway 30/08/96 | 56. India 17/12/96 | 73. Grenada* 28/05/97 | 90. Uganda 25/06/97 |
| 8. Finland 20/09/95 | 25. Spain 30/01/96 | 42. Mongolia 03/09/96 | 57. Ghana 27/12/96 | 74. Cameroon 29/05/97 | 91. Dominican Republic 26/06/97 |
| 9. Togo 04/10/95 | 26. Micronesia 25/03/96 | 43. Central African Republic 05/09/96 | 58. Myanmar* 02/01/97 | 75. Austria* 02/06/97 | 92. Equatorial Guinea 26/06/97 |
| 10. Tunisia 11/10/95 | 27. Israel 26/03/96 | 44. Gabon* 06/09/96 | 59. Argentina 06/01/97 | 76. Iceland* 03/06/97 | 93. Guyana* 26/06/97 |
| 11. Guinea-Bissau 27/10/95 | 28. Portugal 01/04/96 | 45. Botswana 11/09/96 | 60. Burundi 06/01/97 | 77. Antigua and Barbuda 06/06/97 | 94. Seychelles 26/06/97 |
| 12. Mali 31/10/95 | 29. Panama 04/04/96 | 46. Turkmenistan 18/09/96 | 61. Yemen 14/01/97 | 78. Syrian Arab Republic 10/06/97 | 95. El Salvador* 27/06/97 |
| 13. Uzbekistan 31/10/95 | 30. Lebanon 16/05/96 | 47. Zambia 19/09/96 | 62. Paraguay 15/01/97 | 79. Djibouti 12/06/97 | 96. Ethiopia 27/06/97 |
| 14. Afghanistan* 01/11/95 | 31. Algeria 22/05/96 | 48. Lao (PDR) 20/09/96 | 63. Luxembourg 04/02/97 | 80. France 12/06/97 | 97. Kuwait 27/06/97 |
| 15. Peru 09/11/95 | 32. Gambia 11/06/96 | 49. Haiti 25/09/96 | 64. China 18/02/97 | 81. Tanzania 19/06/97 | 98. Angola 30/06/97 |
| 16. Sudan 24/11/95 | 33. Malawi 13/06/96 | | 65. Pakistan 24/02/97 | 82. Guinea 23/06/97 | 99. Belgium* 30/06/97 |
| 17. Canada 01/12/95 | 34. Germany 10/07/96 | | 66. Côte d'Ivoire 04/03/97 | 83. Italy 23/06/97 | 100. St. Kitts and Nevis* 30/06/97 |



Country Parties to the UNCCD

101. Armenia 02/07/97	118. Malta 30/01/98	133. Samoa* 21/08/98	149. Qatar* 15/03/99	166. Suriname* 01/06/00	182. Bosnia and Herzegovina* 26/08/02
102. Saint Lucia* 02/07/97	119. Nicaragua 17/02/98	134. Viet Nam* 25/08/98	150. Solomon Islands* 16/04/99	167. Trinidad and Tobago* 08/06/00	183. Ukraine* 27/08/02
103. Nigeria 08/07/97	120. Liberia* 02/03/98	135. Fiji* 26/08/98	151. Singapore* 26/04/99	168. New Zealand* 07/09/00	184. Maldives* 03/09/02
104. Kazakhstan 09/07/97	121. Comoros 03/03/98	136. Indonesia 31/08/98	152. Colombia 08/06/99	169. Croatia* 06/10/00	185. Latvia* 21/10/02
105. Bahrain* 14/07/97	122. St Vincent and Grenadines 16/03/98	137. Kiribati* 08/09/98	153. Palau* 15/06/99	170. Bahamas* 10/11/00	186. Brunei Darussalam* 04/12/02
106. Tajikistan* 16/07/97	123. European Community 26/03/98	138. Guatemala* 10/09/98	154. Republic of Congo 12/07/99	171. United States of America 17/11/00	187. Russian Federation* 29/05/03
107. Ireland 31/07/97	124. Turkey 31/03/98	139. Japan 11/09/98	155. Hungary* 13/07/99	172. Papua New Guinea* 06/12/00	188. Lithuania* 25/07/03
108. Cambodia 18/08/97	125. Marshall Islands* 02/06/98	140. Tuvalu* 14/09/98	156. Georgia 23/07/99	173. Bulgaria* 21/02/01	189. Bhutan* 20/08/03
109. Dem. Rep. of Congo 12/09/97	126. Venezuela* 29/06/98	141. Nauru* 22/09/98	157. San Marino* 23/07/99	174. Thailand* 07/03/01	190. Timor-Leste* 20/08/03
110. Kyrgyzstan* 19/09/97	127. Sao Tome and Principe 08/07/98	142. Tonga* 25/09/98	158. Vanuatu 10/08/99	175. Slovenia* 28/06/01	191. D.P. Republic of Korea* 29/12/03
111. Zimbabwe 23/09/97	128. Belize* 23/07/98	143. United Arab Emirates* 21/10/98	159. Republic of Korea 17/08/99	176. Belarus* 29/08/01	
112. Sierra Leone 25/09/97	129. Azerbaijan* 10/08/98	144. Rwanda 22/10/98	160. Liechtenstein* 29/12/99	177. Poland* 14/11/01	
113. South Africa 30/09/97	130. Niue* 14/08/98	145. Sri Lanka* 09/12/98	161. Czech Republic* 25/01/00	178. Slovakia* 07/01/02	
114. Chile 11/11/97	131. Romania* 19/08/98	146. Uruguay* 17/02/99	162. Philippines 10/02/00	179. FYR of Macedonia* 06/03/02	
115. Jamaica* 12/11/97	132. Cook Islands* 21/08/98	147. Monaco* 05/03/99	163. Cyprus* 29/03/00	180. Andorra* 15/07/02	
116. Dominica* 08/12/97		148. Republic of Moldova* 10/03/99	164. Albania* 27/04/00	181. Somalia* 24/07/02	
117. Costa Rica 05/01/98			165. Australia 15/05/00		

* Accession



Desertification in the world

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Violent sandstorms in China often force the closure of schools, businesses and airports.





Preserving our common ground
UNCCD
10 years on