

Communication on the third agenda item of the first meeting of the global platform for disaster risk reduction

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Thank you Mr. Chairman

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen

In 1994 the international community agreed to come up with a convention to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought. So far 191 countries have ratified this Convention that make it the overall reference framework for drought mitigation and land degradation control worldwide.

People of the drylands lag far behind the rest of the world in terms of human well-being and development indicators. Dryland populations are often socially and politically marginalized due to their impoverishment and remoteness from centers of decision making. 90% of the dryland populations are living in developing countries. 1 billion of these very vulnerable people are potentially at risk of land degradation. Desertification ranks among the greatest environmental challenges today according to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and is a major impediment to meeting basic human needs.

As we all know the risk is a combination of hazard and vulnerability. This is why the UNCCD gives a central place to disaster risk reduction. In fact, in most arid zones, as we have seen, the populations are very vulnerable and land degradation increases this vulnerability for instance because of the diminution of productivity of food that adversely affects the populations. Furthermore, land degradation increases the hazards, such as the hazard of wildlandfires, flashfloods, dust and sand storms or the increase of the effects of drought. Therefore, by increasing both hazards and vulnerability, land degradation is a major factor of disaster risk in rural areas. At the same time hazards are major factors of land degradation creating a vicious circle that cannot be ended without a sound, long term development policy for rural areas in arid lands.

Ladies and gentlemen, the UNCCD provides a legally binding instrument that supports rural development in arid lands. Through their National Action Programmes to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought, the affected countries define a clear and country owned strategy on these issues, a strategy based on participatory and bottom-up approach, and embedded into their national framework for rural development. So far 88 countries prepared their National Action Programme. The Convention also provides a framework for the development of collaborative partnerships at the regional level through its

Regional Action Programmes. These regional programmes emphasize activities such as Early Warning Systems on drought. In this regard, under the auspices of the Convention several activities were put in place such as the Magrebin warning system for drought with the Observatory of the Sahara and Sahel or the creation of the Drought Management Centre for Central and South Eastern Europe countries in Slovenia.

In conclusion, UNCCD is clearly participating to develop a more secure world by giving to the populations of arid lands the options to end, mitigate or adapt to threats to their human, environmental, and social rights and by giving them the means to have, attain and freely exercise these options. Combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought are very efficient ways for disaster risk reduction on the long term. The countries agreed to give a clear intergovernmental mandate to the Convention on this issue and the UNCCD framework of action, complementary to the Hyogo framework, should be carefully taken into account while developing programmes and activities related to drought and desertification.

The UNCCD stands ready to collaborate actively with partners that are willing to support needs of affected countries in this endeavour.

Thank you Mr. Chairman