

**Message of Luc Gnacadja  
Executive Secretary, UN Convention to Combat Desertification  
on the Occasion of the International Day for Disaster Reduction  
13 October 2010**

‘Making Cities Resilient’ is a most timely call to global action. Cities, from Australia, to the United States, Guatemala, Russia, Burkina Faso and all the way back to China, seem to have been under a siege from extreme weather events. Drylands cities, such as Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso and Marysville in Australia, have not been spared these effects. In the last two years, we have witnessed severe droughts, flash floods, floods and wild fires in drylands cities.

Dryland areas are the third most urbanized ecosystems after coastal and cultivated systems. Urban systems occupy only 2% of the area of the drylands, but they host a large, rapidly increasing dryland population, that is, nearly 45%. Eight of the world’s 20 megacities are located in the drylands. Six are in developing countries.

Sustainable cities are supposed to function in harmony with their respective hinterlands. The urban sprawl and pressure on land and water increases stress on such resources and leads to long-term soil degradation. The fragility of the drylands ecosystems amplifies the risks its cities face, whereas the response capacity of many such urban centers is limited. The events in Port-au-Prince in Haiti and Ouagadougou in Burkina, two major dryland cities, are cases in point.

The essentials required for disaster resilience are lacking in many drylands cities. From both the national and global levels, “a perceived remoteness” of the drylands regions has left many of its cities and regions with minimal infrastructure development, as well as under-developed and under resourced governance, institutional and response capabilities.

To bolster the resilience of drylands cities, a targeted, participatory approach is crucial. The establishment of the Ministry of Development of Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands is a prime example of such targeting. The principles of participation, international solidarity, partnership and of taking into account special needs in planning, which are embedded in the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), provide a solid basis for building resilient cities.

Making cities resilient requires implementing appropriate and smart incentives in order to develop sustainable urban-rural linkages for sustainable land and water management. It also calls for innovative urban planning and management that enhances the rural-urban linkages. Improving market access and establishing efficient value chains are also essential.

The UNCCD supports the two-year campaign to Make Cities Resilient and is collaborating with the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR) under the partnership agreement signed early this year. Measures that make the drylands cities resilient are bound to enhance the livelihoods of affected populations. This is a strategic goal of the Convention.

As we mark the International Day for Disaster Reduction this year, I congratulate the ISDR for its foresight. The global community of the 21st generation will be a predominantly urban-dwelling population. In planning for and developing future cities, we owe it to them to put in

place mechanisms that will guarantee safety in a world that may be fraught with natural disasters.

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