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U.N. AGENCIES CALL FOR STRONGER NATIONAL DROUGHT POLICIES

21 August 2012 (WMO/UNCCD) - The drought gripping the United States of America and the ripple effects on global food markets underline the vulnerability of our inter-connected world to a natural hazard that is expected to increase in future.

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and other UN agencies are stepping up efforts to develop more coordinated and proactive policies for managing drought risk to fill the existing vacuum in virtually every nation.

“Climate change is projected to increase the frequency, intensity, and duration of droughts, with impacts on many sectors, in particular food, water, and energy,” said WMO Secretary-General Michel Jarraud. “We need to move away from a piecemeal, crisis-driven approach and develop integrated risk-based national drought policies.”

“The 2010 drought-induced famine in the Greater Horn of Africa, the ongoing crisis in the Sahel region and the extensive drought in the USA show that developing and developed countries alike are vulnerable,” said Luc Gnacadja, Executive Secretary of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). “Effective long-term solutions to mitigate the effects of drought, and address desertification and land degradation urgently need to be mainstreamed in national development plans and policies.”

To achieve these objectives, WMO, UNCCD and other U.N. partners are organizing a High-level Meeting on National Drought Policy from 11-15 March 2013.

Current Conditions

According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, as of July 31, 62.9 percent of the contiguous U.S. was experiencing moderate to exceptional drought. The percent area of the country in the worst drought categories (extreme to exceptional drought) doubled, from 10 percent in June to 22 percent in July. The extreme dryness and excessive heat devastated crops and livestock from the Great Plains to Midwest. An update issued 16 August said there were a few notable improvements – notably in the Midwest – and some serious degradation.

The U.S. drought monitor map is produced on a weekly basis to provide a simple, accurate way to communicate drought conditions to decision makers and the public. The majority of countries do not possess such a tool.

In addition to the situation in the United States, the latest report from the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration highlighted the weak Southwest monsoon in India.

In India, the southwest monsoon season that began in early June brought deficient rainfall in 50% of the 624 districts in the country through the end of July. From June 1 through August 1, the first half of the monsoon season, total average seasonal rainfall was just 81 percent of the long term average, while the in northwest region of the country cumulative rainfall was 65 percent of the long-term average. In India, monsoon rainfall less than 90 percent of average constitutes drought.

NOAA's *State of the Climate Global Analysis July 2012* said the globally-averaged temperature for July 2012 marked the fourth warmest July since record keeping began in 1880, and the warmest in the United States. It also marked the 329th consecutive month with a global temperature above the 20th century average.

According to the 2011 WMO Statement on the Status of the Global Climate, severe drought developed in parts of East Africa in late 2010 and continued through most of 2011. The most severely affected area encompassed the semi-arid regions of eastern and northern Kenya, western Somalia and some southern border areas of Ethiopia. Outside of East Africa, the most significant drought of the year was in the south-central United States and adjacent areas of northern Mexico.

Notes to Editors:

High-level Meeting on National Drought Policy: <http://www.wmo.int/hmndp>

NOAA's State of the Climate July 2012: <http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/sotc/>

U.S. National Drought Monitor: <http://www.drought.gov>

India Meteorological Department: <http://imd.gov.in>

World Meteorological Organization is the United Nations System's authoritative voice on Weather, Climate and Water

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification is the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment, development and the promotion of healthy soils.

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