

**Message of Monique Barbut**  
**Executive Secretary**  
**United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification**

**INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR DISASTER REDUCTION**  
**13 OCTOBER 2013**

Today, we celebrate how communities are reducing their risk to disasters and raising awareness about the importance of disaster risk reduction by recognizing the untiring efforts of communities around the world to reverse desertification and land degradation, and to mitigate the effects of drought.

Every day, local leaders and communities are rehabilitating and restoring badly degraded lands. We have witnessed the leadership of local communities fighting forest fires in New South Wales in Australia, Colorado in the United States and in south Europe. Communities all over the world, from Ethiopia to Senegal, and from Mongolia to Uzbekistan and China are reforesting vast areas to combat sand and dust storms and to minimize the negative impacts of desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD).

These efforts increase the productivity of the land locally, but also have global spill over benefits for communities far off. They enhance the water supply for communities afar and buttress our global food security. They boost the soil's climate regulatory functions and conserve precious biological diversity.

Drought remains the number one global disaster, while the impacts of land degradation are felt by over 1.5 billion people. A majority of the victims are poor households and communities living in the world's most fragile areas. Thus, the Convention's mandate is unique among other environmental conventions. It places affected populations, particularly women and local communities, at the center of the action program to address DLDD.

Desertification affects 169 countries. Globally, over 2 billion hectares of degraded land have the potential for restoration. Communities are doing their part with what they have, but they cannot do it all alone nor should they have to for we all reap multiple benefits.

If we want to eradicate poverty, to end deforestation or end world hunger and food insecurity; if we aim to tackle climate change or curb the loss of valuable biological diversity altogether; if our ambition is to provide fresh and sustainable water resources and sanitation, then we must invest in sustainable land management and in the restoration and rehabilitation of desertified, degraded and drought-prone areas.

Let us truly honor the efforts communities are making to pursue sustainable land management and mitigate drought by implementing national action programmes and establishing national drought policies that buttress our collective resilience to disasters.

I congratulate the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction for once again bringing global attention to the work of local communities addressing disaster risk reduction.