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Remarks by
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on
the occasion of the introduction
of the Issues Brief on DLDD
before the
Third Session of the United Nations
General Assembly
Open Working Group on Sustainable Development
Goals

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Excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues,

It is indeed timely that the third session of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals is taking up the issues of desertification, land degradation, and drought also known as DLDD issues.

Land is a vital natural capital for producing food and other ecosystem goods and services. It is even more so for the rural poor who rely heavily on land as their most significant asset for their livelihoods and well-being.

That is why, as global assessments indicate, poverty which remains overwhelmingly rural correlates highly with land degradation; more than 40% of the world's degraded lands are found in areas with the highest incidence of poverty.

Land degradation refers to the loss of the biological productivity of the topsoil. It is caused by human activities and natural processes and is being exacerbated by the adverse impacts of climate change. It negatively affects water resources, drives deforestation, and contributes to environmentally induced migrations.

DLDD processes have accelerated in the last century. Global assessments indicate that the percentage of total land area that is already degraded has increased from 15% in 1991 to 24% in 2008.

A recent study suggests that land degradation costs the global community up to 5% of global agricultural GDP. While the world's drylands continue to be the most vulnerable and threatened by DLDD processes, land degradation is a global phenomenon, with 78% of total degraded land located in terrestrial ecosystems other than drylands. DLDD directly affects 1.5 billion people around the world by 2008 estimate.

Productive land is becoming a strategic commodity as it is central to the "nexus" that links food, water, energy, and environmental health in an interdependent loop. Between 1985 and 2005, the world's croplands and pastures expanded by 154 million hectares. By 2030 in the next two decades or so, we might need to convert some additional 200 million ha of forest and grassland into agricultural land in order to match the demands for food, energy, and water which are expected to increase by at least 50%, 45% and 30%, respectively.

At Rio plus 20, world leaders recognized that desertification, land degradation and drought are challenges of a global dimension impeding the sustainable development of all countries; they agreed to strive to achieve a land-degradation neutral world in the context of sustainable development. They undertook to monitor, land degradation processes globally under the aegis of the UNCCD, and to step up efforts in reclaiming degraded lands in drylands.

A Land Degradation Neutral World (LDNW) is simply a world where we prevent or avoid the degradation of productive lands, and where feasible, regenerate land that is already degraded, preferably in the same landscape. As we welcome another two billion people to our planet over the next 30 years, it is clear that we must restore more land than we degrade.

We need to translate the aspirational goal of a land-degradation neutral world into an overarching SDG on land such as: “sustainable land use for all and by all” and make it operational for instance with three concrete targets: (1) Zero net land degradation by 2030, or net restoration of degraded lands by 2030; (2) Zero net forest degradation by 2030; and (3) Drought policies and drought preparedness measures put in place in all drought-prone countries by 2020.

Progress in implementation should be monitored and assessed on the basis of agreed indicators. This will also require a solid and up to date scientific and technical base, hence the imperative to establish a globally agreed and recognized, credible and transparent scientific and technical mechanism on land and soil.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In our era of incredible flux a SDG on land as a natural capital will drive partnerships and resource mobilization for landscape-based multi-sectoral approaches.

We must recognize that the many millions of people who manage agricultural systems, from the very poorest to the most commercialized producers, constitute the largest group of natural resource managers on earth. Their decisions, as well as those of the

world's 7 billion consumers, will shape global food and nutrition security and the health of the world's ecosystems into the future.

In conclusion, not only would a SDG on land create synergies with a number of other global commitments, it would also add value by providing a strategic framework for sustainable land management policies; ensuring complementarity and coherence in addressing DLDD; ensuring predictability and concerted action globally; and stimulating action at all levels of governance.

Poverty is at its most shocking among the populations that depend directly on degraded land. Land stewardship must therefore be front and center in the post 2015 global development agenda to catalyze policy and mobilize resources in order to improve the conditions of the underperforming assets of the poor most notably land.

If we do not rise to this challenge, we will not achieve our commitments for climate change adaptation and mitigation, biodiversity conservation, forest and MDG targets; we will not alleviate rural poverty and hunger nor ensure long-term food security nor build resilience to drought and water stress.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 3 key words here are: people, landscape and stewardship. And please remember that "Enhancing soil anywhere, enhances life everywhere".