

Statement by the Delegation of Canada to the Sixteenth Session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development

Wednesday, May 7 2008, 3:00 pm – Global Dimensions of Desertification in the Context of Poverty Reduction

Mr./Madame Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates, ladies and gentleman:

Sustainable development is about enhancing the quality of human life while preserving natural capital for future development and prosperity. Poverty works against sustainable development by limiting available choices and leading individuals and communities to engage in unsustainable practices. In many countries where populations depend on natural resources to meet basic needs, local environmental degradation exacerbates poverty. Land degradation, particularly in dryland areas where the problem is referred to as “desertification”, has a significant impact on the livelihoods of the poor, and constitutes a major threat to poverty reduction and overall socio-economic development. It is both a cause and a consequence of poverty.

Canada has been a strong supporter of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification since ratifying it in 1995, and plays a dual role in the implementation of the Convention, both as an affected country (i.e., semi-arid regions in Western Canada) and more significantly, as a donor country assisting the developing world in meeting the Convention’s objectives. Since ratification, Canada has been assisting many countries in dealing with the challenges of land degradation through activities ranging from market gardening and erosion control in West Africa, to water management in Central Asia, agroforestry in South Asia, or soil conservation and remote sensing in Latin America. Canada’s integration of land-related programming, including desertification, has underscored the four interconnected dimensions of sustainable development: *economic well-being, social development, environmental sustainability, and good governance*. Canada’s approach to addressing desertification issues and other impacts of land degradation in partner countries is premised on sustainable development, and emphasizes poverty reduction, capacity development and participatory initiatives. These take place at all levels of intervention, involving people and institutions from the community to regional and international levels.

Lessons drawn from analyses, assessments and evaluations of Canadian supported development cooperation projects demonstrate that initiatives that integrate agriculture, environment, education, gender, health and other relevant sectors, have a greater chance of success, particularly at the community level. This approach is particularly pertinent in areas where local populations derive their livelihoods from land and other natural resources. Integrated resource management strategies that build on indigenous conservation practices and involve local structures also tend to yield better results. Projects working closely with small-scale farmers and communities have better success

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rates and are more sustainable than those that rely on large scale agricultural systems. In addition, flexible programme and project design allows for better integration of innovation, particularly technical innovations by farmers.

Canada applauds the efforts of the desertification Convention's Executive Secretary, Mr. Luc Gnacadja, to elevate the profile of desertification as a key environment and development issue, and will continue to support activities to combat desertification, land degradation and drought in a manner consistent with the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) *Agenda 21* and the goals and objectives of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in particular.

Thank you.