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DROUGHT AND DESERTIFICATION

Statement by
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on behalf of the European Union
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Mr. Chair!

I have the honour to present today as the EU Presidency this intervention on behalf of the European Union.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Serbia, as well as the Republic of Moldova, Armenia and Georgia align themselves with this statement.*

The outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development have emphasized the role of the UNCCD as the instrument to reverse and prevent desertification/land degradation and to mitigate the effects of drought in affected areas in order to support poverty reduction and environmental sustainability.

Millennium Ecosystem Assessment has confirmed that there is an intrinsic relationship and a vicious circle between poverty, desertification and drought.

Similarly to other serious ecosystem degradation phenomena, drought and desertification can, directly or indirectly, take lives and undermine the capability of human development. In some regions, drought and desertification might even contribute to migration as well as to tensions and conflict.

By 2015, the international community is committed to achieve the MDGs, but whether it will succeed or not in this objective strongly depends upon the capability to cope with unsolved environmental problems.

The knowledge base to fight and control desertification and manage drought needs to be strengthened. Indeed, a permanent global monitoring and assessment structure does not exist and information is rather fragmented. The EU has emphasized the need for better performance of work through the Commission on Science and Technology of the UNCCD. That is to say that support to scientific research, data collection and monitoring initiatives with the aim to develop a globally shared and affordable monitoring and reporting system is therefore still much needed, together with the support for information availability and diffusion, identification and diffusion of appropriate technology, support and preservation of traditional knowledge.

Notwithstanding such gaps, the combination of the recent findings of the Fourth Assessment Report of the IPCC, the Global Environment Outlook GEO 4, Environment for Development of the UNEP, the OECD Environmental Outlook to 2030 and, as for the European Region in particular, the UNECE Europe's Environment Fourth Assessment, has shown the increasing vulnerability of the people and the environment to drought and desertification. Land degradation, desertification and drought are in need for better scientific governance both at international and national level to ensure appropriate policy coherence, strong action and concrete deliverables. The UNCCD and its bodies have engaged in an ambitious reform process under the 10-Year Strategy in order to tackle these challenges and to mobilize science and technology experts, networks and institutions with excellence in drought and desertification.

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

The EU warmly welcomes the work carried out by the scientific community that in the last years has increasingly provided us - the policy-makers - with sound data.

However, the EU believes that much stronger efforts should be done by the international policy-makers to urgently act upon such findings, given the fact that uncontroversial and scientific evidence indicates that an environmental friendly investment today is capable to save major restoration costs that will certainly occur in the future. Internalization of environmental costs and the consideration of costs of inaction should be an integral part of today and future policy making.

Forests are an important component of any policy addressed to combat climate change, drought and desertification. At international level, notwithstanding the lack of an international agreement on forests, some steps have been carried out thanks to the establishment of the "Non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests".

The linkages between drought, desertification and climate change have been found to be strong but they still need to be properly addressed. The potentiality of soil protection as a mean for climate change mitigation and adaptation should be further explored and synergies between adaptation and desertification policies, projects and programmes should also be sought.

In order to achieve this aim it is of paramount importance that country parties establish appropriate linkages between their Regional and National Action Programmes to Combat Desertification and the NSDS, PRS, UNFCCC National Programmes for Adaptation and Mitigation, UNCBD National Strategies and Action Plans and National Forests Plans. Behaving otherwise would impede the promotion of an integrated approach to policy planning and implementation. The lack of linkages between NAP and agricultural policies and water management plans impedes the implementation of this integrated approach as well.

In 2005, GEF has approved sustainable land management as one of its focal areas, enhancing the financial resources available for desertification and drought. This has been the fulfilment of one of the commitments set in the JPoI. However, as planned within the 10-year strategic plan, innovative sources of finance still need to be identified by the private sector, market-based mechanisms and other financing mechanisms for hunger and poverty reduction. To strengthen the adaptive capacity of dryland populations and thus reduce their vulnerability to climate change, mechanisms created for climate change adaptation are particularly relevant.

Because desertification and drought affect the poorest people of the world, ODA flows are of major importance. In this context, there is the need to strengthen the integration of sustainable land and water management issues within the overall efforts to improve aid coordination and aid effectiveness. The ongoing work of the joint OECD EPOC/DAC meetings could be one of the fora to pursue such an objective also in view of the coming 2nd Joint Ministerial DAC/EPOC Meeting in the first half of 2009. The role of the GM (Global Mechanism, IFAD) is important in this perspective.

There is a general lack of coherence and complementarity in the international financial flows, while there is the need to improve the system of financial reporting by multilateral, bilateral, and national investments in SLM, including the UNCCD. Therefore, international institutions involved should engage in a more frequent and effective dialogue.

Mr Chairman,

We hope that the EU has given a clear picture of what the EU considers a major gap still to be overcome in achieving the commitments made in the context of the Agenda 21 and the JPoI.

Thank you.