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## PRESS RELEASE

### Africa acts on distressed migration of youth

**16 June 2017, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso** – A high-level symposium of Africa's interior, environment and foreign affairs ministers has warned that ignoring the plight of jobless young people in sub-Saharan Africa is a recipe for political instability and global insecurity. They called for support to create land-based jobs in the rural areas to ward off the temptation for the most disillusioned to take up alternative but dangerous sources of income.

This is the first time high-ranking officials drawn from Africa's foreign affairs, environment and interior ministries have met jointly to find solutions to Africa's growing challenge of rural youth unemployment that is driving distress migration and radicalization of disillusioned young men.

A few weeks ago the Group of 7 (G-7) leaders declared that Africa's security, stability and sustainable development are high priorities for G-7 countries.

The symposium held yesterday in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, stressed that Africa's heavy reliance on the natural resource base for livelihoods is a challenge, and its mismanagement increases household risks and amplifies the vulnerability of millions of people.

They called for the identification of sites where tenure or access to land rights can be secured and provided to vulnerable at-risk-groups. They also called for partnerships to create 2 million secure land-based jobs through rehabilitation of 10 million hectares of degraded land.

They also called for investment in rural infrastructure, rehabilitation tools and skills development and prioritization of job creation in unstable and insecure areas.

President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré of Burkina Faso delivered a speech jointly prepared with Presidents Ibrahim Boubacar Keita of Mali and Mahamadou Issoufou of Niger, who also attended the ceremony in solidarity. The Presidents also received the Symposium's outcome, a Call to Action, which was presented by Batio Bassiere, Burkina Faso's Minister of Environment, Green Economy and Climate Change on behalf of the participants that the high-level symposium.

The symposium examined the threats connected to sustainability, stability and security, namely, conflicts linked to access to degrading natural resources, instability due to unemployment of rural youth and insecurity and the risk of the radicalization triggered by social and economic marginalization and exposure to extremist groups.

The Symposium was part of the global celebration of World Day to Combat Desertification. Two days earlier, more than 170 civil society representatives from African participated in their World Day observance, also in Ouagadougou, and organized by [Spong](#), a local non-governmental organization (NGO), to prepare for the International Summit of CSOs titled, *Desertif'actions 2017*, to be held on 27 and 28 June 2017 in Strasbourg, France.



The outcomes of the Strasbourg Summit will be presented to the 13th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD to be held in Ordos, China, in September 2017, and the 23rd session of the Conference of Parties to the Climate Change Convention.

During the celebrations, Executive Secretary Barbut announced the two winners of the prestigious Land for Life Award: Practical Action Sudan/UNEP from South Sudan; Watershed Organization Trust from India. The *Land for Life China* award was given to Ms Yingzhen Pan, Director General of National Bureau to Combat Desertification, China.

The winners will be recognized at the award ceremony which is planned at the Kubuqi International Desert Forum next month.

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### **Notes to Editors**

For background information and materials about the Day, [click here](#)

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### **Quotes**

**President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré of Burkina Faso, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita of Mali and Mahammadou Issoufou of Niger:** Drought, food insecurity, water scarcity, unemployment, hopelessness about the future and poverty are fertile grounds for extremism, and a sign of insecurity, instability and unsustainability. The 1<sup>st</sup> African Action Summit by Heads of State and Government held in Marrakesh in 2016 launched the Sustainability, Stability and Security initiative – the 3S Initiative – with a commitment to speed up the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded lands as a means to create jobs for rural youth. The question we must answer today is this: are we capable of continuing to invest for the future?"

**Monique Barbut, Executive Secretary, UN Convention to Combat Desertification:** More than 375 million young people will enter Africa's job market over the next 15 years, of whom 200 million be living in the rural areas. Millions of rural young people face an uncertain future due to the lack of decent rural jobs and continuous loss of livelihoods due to land degradation and falling yields...Frustrations will boil over with more migration and more conflict over a shriveling resource base. The challenge is bigger than just a matter of a million young African's attempting to make the move towards Europe over the course of a year. The UK Ministry of Defence estimates up to 60 million Africans are at risk of distressed migration as a result of land degradation and desertification pressures in the next two decades. Imagine what could happen if each of you committed to rehabilitate 100,000 hectares of land in your respective countries... If young people in Africa were given the chance to bring that natural capital back to life and into



production... With the right type of investments in land, rural infrastructure and skills development, the future in your region can be bright.

**Batio Bassiere, Minister of Environment, Green Economy and Climate Change, Burkina Faso:**

Burkina Faso, on average, loses 360,000 ha of land to degradation every year, with significant impacts on 85% of the population that lives off agriculture and pastoral activities. As stated in the theme of the World Day to Combat Desertification, *Our Land, Our Home, Our Future* must be preserved against all forms of degradation or desertification. Burkina Faso is now among the 110 countries that to-date have committed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal target of land degradation neutrality by 2030.

**Quotes: Land for Life Award Winners**

**Monique Barbut, Executive Secretary, UNCCD, regarding the winners:** The winners show that restoration of degraded land can halt distress migration that is driven by unproductive land resources. Families and communities are transformed and become more resilient towards climate change when job opportunities are created. When practices like these are amplified globally, sustainability, stability and security of all is possible. It only requires political will and decisive action against losing more productive land to desertification.

**Awadalla Hamid, Practical Action Sudan, North Darfur:** Practical Action and all our partners are delighted to have won the global Land for Life Award 2017. Ecosystem-based approaches to disaster risk reduction (Eco-DRR) are certainly an effective approach for bringing together beneficiary communities and relevant state institutions as partners in building local resilience. Winning the Global Land for Life Award 2017 was made possible by the successful collaboration between Practical Action, the UN Environment, the European Union and all other partners.

**Marcella D'Souza, Watershed Organization Trust from India:** Combating desertification can be realized! Team WOTR is thrilled that we have proved it substantially. Thank you UNCCD for recognizing the years of silent committed effort of my team and villagers through this prestigious award. We thank our funders – the BMZ with the KfW and GIZ, the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation, NABARD, the Indian Government and our many donors who have helped us realize this. WOTR renews its commitment to continue Combating Desertification.

**Abdalla Latief, Director General, State Ministry of Agriculture North Darfur:** Excellent news on the occasion of Ramadan. It is extremely rewarding for the Eco DRR project in North Darfur to be awarded the Global Land for Life Award 2017 by the UNCCD Secretariat. It is a great accomplishment for our communities, the UN Environment, the state government of North Darfur, Practical Action and the Voluntary Networks. I had faith that the exceptional devotion and efficient coordination towards implementing Eco-DRR projects was leading us to success.

**Erik Solheim, Head of UN Environment:** I'm immensely proud of the work UN Environment is doing to help improve people's lives in North Darfur and around the world. Winning this award proves that by working together in effective partnerships and hand in hand with communities



themselves, we can make positive and lasting change, even in some of the most difficult situations.

**Winner of Land for Life China Award:**

**Pan Yingzhen, Director General of National Bureau to Combat Desertification, China:** Thank you UNCCD for awarding this Land for Life Award. I am very honored. This is a recognition not only for myself but also for those who have worked hard to fight desertification. The award also gives affirmation to our government's commitment to combat land degradation and encouragement to people to restore degraded land. As the China National Focal Point of Combating Desertification, I will continue together with my colleagues to lead and realize the work of rehabilitating degraded land. Let our land be alive again, giving more hopes and opportunities!

**About UNCCD**

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is the only legally binding international agreement on land issues. The Convention promotes good land stewardship. Its 196 Parties aim, through partnerships, to implement the Convention and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The end goal is to protect our land, from over-use and drought, so it can continue to provide us all with food, water and energy. By sustainably managing land and striving to achieve land degradation neutrality, now and in the future, we will reduce the impact of climate change, avoid conflict over natural resources and help communities to thrive.