

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **UN calls for the restoration of ecosystems to reduce climate change disasters**

**Bonn, 17 June 2014.** UN Secretary General **Ban Ki-moon** has called for the recovery of degraded lands in order to avert the worst effects of climate change, produce sufficient food and ease competition over resources, in his message for the World Day to Combat Desertification being observed today.

“Land degradation, caused or exacerbated by climate change, is not only a danger to livelihoods, but also a threat to peace and stability,” he said, adding that “with world population rising, it is urgent that we work to build the resilience of all productive land resources and the communities that depend on them.”

“Climate change is changing the dynamic between water and the land. Our focus on the future impacts of climate change has blinded us to the crucial fact that the status of the land is already changing.... Soil formation takes many years, but just one flood can sweep it all away,” said **Monique Barbut, Executive Secretary, UN Convention to Combat Desertification**, and the UN’s top advisor on desertification, land degradation and drought.

He said “collaborative programs such as TerrAfrica are introducing innovations and sustainable approaches which can be scaled and transform development.”

The World Day to Combat Desertification is celebrated in every country on 17 June, following a 1995 decision by the UN General Assembly to raise global awareness about desertification, land degradation and drought.

Ecosystem-based adaptation, the theme for this year’s World Day to Combat Desertification observance, emphasizes the importance of restoring degrading ecosystems to good health in order to avoid or soften the potentially disastrous impacts of climate change.

Studies show that 24 billion tons of fertile soil are being eroded each year, and 2 billion hectares of degraded land have potential for recovery and restoration.

The UNCCD is holding a global observance at the World Bank headquarters in Washington D.C., United States on June 17, 2014, with high-level participation, where the winners of the Land for Life Award, for excellence in sustainable land management, will be announced.

Several countries will name their Dryland Champions, local heroes who have made a significant practical contribution to sustainable land management.

Brazil, Chile, People's Republic of China, Hungary, Iran, Kenya, Kuwait, Mali, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru, Republic of Korea, Singapore, South Africa Switzerland, Ukraine and many others have reported that they will hold national events.

Additional information on the Day is available at: <http://www.unccd.int/en/programmes/Event-and-campaigns/WDCD/Pages/WDCD-2014.aspx>

### **Quotes from Heads of Agencies**

**Michel Jarraud**

**Secretary General, World Meteorological Organization**

The recent 5th Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change stated that impacts from recent climate-related extremes, such as heat waves, droughts, floods, cyclones, and wildfires, reveal significant vulnerability and exposure of some ecosystems and many human systems to current climate variability. These impacts include alteration of ecosystems, disruption of food production and water supply, damage to infrastructure and settlements, morbidity and mortality, and consequences for human well-being. For countries at all levels of development, these impacts are consistent with a significant lack of preparedness for current climate variability in some sectors.

The theme of this year, "Land Belongs to the Future, Let's Climate Proof It!", highlights the benefits of mainstreaming sustainable land management policies and practices within climate change adaptation — a way to increase community and ecosystem resilience while improving human conditions, particularly in the dryland regions of the world.

**Braulia Ferreira de Souza Dias,**

**Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity**

As we celebrate the World Day to Combat Desertification under the slogan "Land Belongs to the Future, Let's Climate Proof It!" let us strive for sustainable strategies that integrate the management of land, water and biodiversity through sustaining ecosystem services and thereby combating desertification and adapting to climate change. In this way we can demonstrate how the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 can contribute to achieving the objectives of the three Rio conventions.

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### **About the UNCCD**

Desertification, along with climate change and the loss of biodiversity, were identified as the greatest challenges to sustainable development during the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. Established in 1994, UNCCD is the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment,

development and the promotion of healthy soils. The Convention's 195 Parties work to alleviate poverty in the drylands, maintain and restore the land's productivity, and mitigate the effects of drought.

**About the World Bank/TerrAfrica**