

**Message of Monique Barbut**  
**Executive Secretary, UN Convention to Combat Desertification**

**International Day of Forests**  
**21 March 2014**  
**Celebrating Forests for Sustainable Development**

Forests and trees are the key to healthy landscapes. Equally significant, they have a direct bearing on our peace and security.

Many ongoing conflicts began with the degradation of ecosystems that have collapsed and are no longer able to offer basic services such as food, water and income generating activities. Forced migration and conflict have followed in their wake, undermining peace and security within and across countries.

Deforestation is the first step to ecosystem degradation, and is followed swiftly by land degradation and desertification. Forest degradation is occurring at an alarming rate, mostly due to an inadequate agriculture production system and the need for energy. Today, 169 countries claim to be affected by desertification.

Globally, 30% of the Earth, some 4 billion hectares, is forest cover and half of it is located in five countries only. But some 2 billion hectares of degraded forest can be restored. The private sector target to restore 10 million hectares by 2020, in response to the Bonn Challenge, is commendable but a lot more is required.

The social and economic benefits of restoring degraded forests and land are apparent and quantifiable. Water availability and peace returned after the restoration of the Mau Forest ecosystem in Kenya. The economy, incomes and quality of life of the communities in the Loess Plateau of China – an area about the size of France – have improved significantly since its restoration began a little over two decades ago.

Between 1957 and 1980, forest cover in the Republic of Korea increased from 34% to 64% and led to the restoration of diverse ecosystem services – forest recreation, enhanced water storage, improved air and water quality, soil erosion control and landslide prevention. The annual return from this investment is over US\$61 billion.

Celebrating forests for sustainable development demands practical actions to restore all degraded forests and land with the potential to recover. We have the knowledge, technology and means to conserve our forests and pursue gainful development. History will judge us harshly if we fail.

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