

Opening Remarks
One Belt One Road – Joint Action to Achieve LDN
15 October 2015, 13.00

MET08

(650 words – 6 minutes)

Thank you for inviting me.

The UN now estimates that there will be at least 9.5 billion humans on earth by 2050. These extra 2 billion people will demand food, water, energy, good jobs and a viable future. There will be a lot of pressure on governments to provide these things. Environmental degradation and climate change are already amplifying the pressures countries face. As the pressures mount and if the demands are not met, there will be a situation of even greater social instability, more forced migration and competition/conflict over natural resources. We are already seeing these trends emerge.

The British philosopher Bertrand Russell once said “*The only thing that will redeem mankind is cooperation*”.

The One Belt One Road initiative can be a model of cooperation and connectivity. It can build breathe vibrancy into communities all along the Silk Belt and Road – linking economies and people.

But land degradation is very clearly a rate-limiting step to your vision and plans. Most of the countries along the route are suffering from increasing drought. All are subject to land degradation and desertification processes, including dust and sand storms, of one form or another. The associated losses, in productivity and in the services we get from the land and soil, undermine economic opportunity and potential for growth.

To be successful, we have to address this issue head on. All sectors of society need to be engaged.

By achieving land degradation neutrality along the Silk Belt and Road, I firmly believe you will put in place a solid foundation for truly sustainable development for all.

In practical terms, land degradation neutrality means increasing the amount of healthy and productive land available. It is as simple as that. Productive and healthy land will be able to provide the food, water, energy, good jobs and a viable future that people need.

Land dependent businesses and the land dependent poor will flourish.

In reality, we need to transform policy and practice to support 1) sustainable management of all lands and 2) the rehabilitation and restoration of degraded lands on a massive scale.

Along the Silk Belt and Road it means doing this across national borders. It means learning from each other and replicating success. To my mind, it is a natural fit for effective and innovative public-private partnerships.

If you can take action together to achieve land degradation neutrality, it would represent a real “ribbon of hope”. And a hugely positive step on the pathway towards achieving one of the most important Global Goals for Sustainable Development.

We are in talks with some of the organizations behind the Silk Road Economic Belt (e.g. Elion Resources Group, Green Silk Road Fund, Green China Foundation) for a collaboration with the land degradation neutral Fund in terms of a co-investment into the various projects under the initiative.

One of the projects, combining solar power and land rehabilitation, in Pakistan is currently being assessed by the Fund’s advisors. We look

forward to this type of collaboration in the future as you build the Belt and Road.

As a last thought, for most Europeans when they think about the Silk Road, they think about the wondrous stories of the 14th century adventurer Marco Polo. He described his journey but admitted on arriving home *“I have not told half of what I saw.”*

In completing the One Belt and One Road Project you will be building a wonder for the modern age.

When we meet again to describe the Belt and Road project, hopefully at a high level dialogue around the 2016 World Day to Combat Desertification events, we will start to see new wondrous tales emerging of a region connected and transformed.

I congratulate the SFA for their vision, I wish you luck with the event and I wish you success in the project.

Thank you.