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SPEECH OF MONIQUE BARBUT
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, UN CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION

World Day to Combat Desertification Global Observance Event
Land Belongs to the Future – Let's Climate Proof it
Tuesday, 17 June 2014
World Bank, Washington DC, Preston Auditorium

Your Excellency Mr Brigi Rafini, Prime Minister of Niger,
Your Excellency Mr Uahekua Herunga, Minister of Environment and Tourism, Namibia
Your Excellency, Mr Adamou Chaifou, Minister of Environment, Urban Safety and
Sustainable Development of Niger
Dr Naoko Ishii, Chief Executive Officer of the Global Environment Facility,
Mr Mahmoud Mohieldin, Corporate Secretary and President's Special Envoy,
Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen;

The IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report revealed our vulnerability and exposure to climate change. Our ecosystems are being pushed to breaking point. In the face of extreme events - like droughts and floods, no country or region is immune.

The poorest people, with the fewest options, are hit hardest of course. This is regardless of the level of national development. Climate change and land degradation taken together are threat amplifiers. Populations living on degraded land are the most exposed to climate change, food insecurity, poverty and conflict. It is clear that the impact, of land degradation and climate-related extremes, on society is directly related to how prepared we are. Unfortunately, people and ecosystems are simply not ready or resilient enough. We are seeing the implications of our inaction as competition for scarce natural resources increases pitting communities against each other and removing choice from the most vulnerable.

So while mitigation can certainly slow climate change, at this point, it will not suffice. We have to recognize international climate change negotiations are cumbersome. We are trying to turn a problem the size of an ocean liner on a dime. To avoid Titanic-sized climate disasters rapidly becoming the norm, we must also start preparing for the unavoidable. At this stage, adaptation should be an integral part of everyone's response to climate change.

So far, too little is being done for adaptation at a large scale. The potential of land management, for example, has not been sufficiently recognized. The resilience of the land determines how everything else copes – people, homes, rivers, agriculture and wildlife.

In my view, climate impacts are felt at the local level – by households, individuals and communities. So, the most successful adaptation measures need to be very practical and empowering and at these levels. Estimates of the cost of adaptation vary, but they are all in the billions of dollars. I argue that there are more cost-effective options out there, powered

by nature. If we can harness them, we can reduce the global adaptation bill considerably. But we need to start thinking about adaptation from a common – universal – perspective. We need a simple approach that everyone, everywhere can understand and do something about.

Adaptation powered by land is a good place to start because everyone can relate to it. We build our homes, factories and roads on the land. Productive land is vital for life – for food, energy and water. And yet, human activity and changing weather patterns are degrading land faster than it can recover naturally.

We have simple and affordable techniques that can stop land degradation in its tracks; techniques that support the health of entire ecosystems and make them resilient to climate shocks.

For example, in West Africa, at least a quarter of a million (250,000) hectares of degraded land is being restored to crop production annually using a low-cost, sustainable land restoration technique called *Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration*. Agroforestry has taken hold. Farmers learnt from their neighbors and replicated what they saw. We can see increasing productivity and greater resilience to drought. The farmers in Niger who rolled out this agroforestry practice, after the terrible drought in the 1980's, were able to survive the bad droughts the region has experienced since then. More than 5 million hectares are back in production. Communities remained food secure.

So, the success of adaptation does not depend on new technology or vast amounts of new finance. It requires smart investments and a rethinking of existing financing strategies.

The UNCCD recommends more than 250 good land management practices that can be shared and used in various ecosystems. Most of these are modifications of low-cost traditional practices, knowledge and skills. Replicating these practices at a large scale would have global impact. It would create employment in rural areas and transform once barren lands into oceans of opportunity. This is why we advocate for the land-based ecosystem adaptation.

We could scale it up on a global level through targets and indicators to achieve land-degradation neutrality in the post 2015 world. If we establish common measures of success at the global level; if we invest sensibly in sustainable land use practices by realigning investment flows; if we establish safety nets for times of disaster, we can ease the food, water, income and security threats that we all face. Globally, we can move from competition over scarce resources to collaboration on implementing practical solutions.

We can build resilience. And recognizing excellence motivates others to change and move along this new resilient pathway.

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and its partner organizations recognize the champions of sustainable land management in a variety of ways – including the Land for Life Award. The winners of the Award will be announced here today.

And around the world, countries are marking World Day to Combat Desertification by recognizing their own champions. These are the people, mostly fantastic civil society leaders, who promote grassroots action and keep the land healthy and productive.

To my mind, we are standing together at an important crossroad. Over the next 18 months, decisions will be taken about the Post 2015 Development Agenda and the future direction of climate action. As climate change brings more extreme weather, prolonged droughts, water shortages, and food insecurity, excellent examples of land-based adaptation will be more pivotal than ever.

I am delighted to celebrate this year's World Day to Combat Desertification with you. The World Bank and the GEF are two of the largest financial entities with the muscle to shape global investments for the land. Together, I hope we can choose a path that leads us towards land-based resilience. Certainly, the amount of productive land to support vital ecosystem services needs to increase. It is one of the only ways we can climate proof the future.

I thank the World Bank, the Global Environment Facility, TerrAfrica and Connect 4 Climate for making this global observance event possible.

Land belongs to the future – let's climate proof it. Thank you.
