

2017 World Day to Combat Desertification – WMO contribution

Theme: Our Land. Our Home. Our Future.

On behalf of WMO and the National Meteorological and Hydrological Services of the world, I would like to congratulate the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification UNCCD and Executive Secretary Monique Barbut, on the occasion of the World Day to Combat Desertification 2017.

This year's theme is "Our Land. Our Home. Our Future".

2016 made history, with a record global temperature, exceptionally low sea ice, and unabated sea level rise and ocean heat. It was the warmest year on record: a remarkable 1.1 °C above the pre-industrial period, which is 0.06 °C above the previous record set in 2015. This increase in global temperature is consistent with other changes in the climate system. Globally averaged sea-surface temperatures were also the warmest on record concurrent with a strong El Niño event; global sea levels continued to rise; and Arctic sea-ice extent was well below average for most of the year. Extreme weather and climate conditions have continued into 2017.

With carbon dioxide reaching a record annual average concentration of 400 parts per million (ppm) in the atmosphere, the influence of human activities on the climate system has become more and more evident. This influence is increasingly being demonstrated by attribution studies for some of the most critical weather and climate extremes, in particular extremes related to heat. Because the societal and economic impacts of climate change have become so important, WMO has partnered with other UN organizations to share information how climate has affected people, agriculture, health and other sectors.

Soils are the thin productive skin of land and they are very sensitive to atmospheric factors ranging from chemical composition, aerosols, rainfall characteristics, wind and temperatures. Soil health is closely linked with climate characteristics and will follow and suffer from climate extremes and accelerated changes.

Soils and landscapes seem to be constant features but they can change every year following seasonal variations and more intense human activities. Atmospheric composition and consequent temperature, rainfall and moisture changes in average and extreme conditions, cause additional stress on vegetation and animals and impacts on soil health are growing, challenging our management capabilities.

In past times, natural climate cycles bringing more or less rain helped entire communities or, even civilizations to prosperity, to migrate or to vanish.

Migration of nomadic communities from Asia to Europe, from Nordic countries to Southern countries or colonization of some areas such as Greenland could be explained by the occurrence of more favourable or unfavourable climate conditions.

In our current world, migration flows are easier than in the past but would have also long-term consequences specially if the climate continues to show sign of accelerated changes. In such a scenario, providing state of art climate information, including historical data, climate modelling, climate monitoring and sub-seasonal to seasonal predictions would be a key stone for climate change adaptation in vital sectors as

agriculture, food security and social well-being. Increased frequency of droughts can lead to land degradation and eventually, if unchecked, to increased desertification.

WMO, UNCCD and other partners are committed to work together in developing integrated drought management for the countries of the world.

UNCCD and WMO are cooperating in mutually supporting initiatives on their government and scientific-technical bodies attending regularly their meetings and promoting joint side-events mainly on drought issues.

UNCCD, with FAO and WMO, were one of the main UN Organizations driving the High Level Meeting on National Drought Policies (HMNDP) held in March 2013 that produced the HMNDP Declaration. On occasion of that event, the Integrated Drought Management Programme (IDMP), supported by WMO and the Global Water Partnership, was established and UNCCD became a partner in December 2013. WMO and other partners approach to flood and drought issues through the Associated Programme on Flood Management and IDMP promote proactive approaches by monitoring, impact assessment and prevention plans.

The outcomes from the HMNDP assisted several countries with developing national drought policies and was the basis for the organization the African Drought Conference held in Windhoek, Namibia in August 2016. The Conference adopted the Windhoek Declaration for Enhancing Resilience to Drought in Africa was approved the Strategic Framework for Drought Risk Management and Enhancing Resilience in Africa guided by the following six elements:

1. Drought Policy and Governance for Drought Risk Management;
2. Drought Monitoring and early warning;
3. Drought vulnerability and impact assessment;
4. Drought mitigation, preparedness, and response;
5. Knowledge management and drought awareness,
6. Reducing underlying factors of drought risk.

Based on the success of the African Drought Conference, UNCCD is organizing the Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Conference for Drought Management and Preparedness from 14 to 16 August 2017 in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia. WMO and other partner organizations are also contributing to this event.

WMO is also committed in constant project development and implementation through the Global Framework of Climate Services to make effective use of climate information in decision making on critical societal sectors including disaster risk reduction and agriculture and food security.

Therefore, on this auspicious occasion, I would like to reiterate our sincere appreciation to Ms Barbut for this vital partnership and to wish UNCCD an exceptional World Day to Combat Desertification.

Thank you.