

## Hearing at the Italian Parliament

**19 March 2015, 08-10.00 hrs**

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Last month's beheading of 21 Egyptian Christians in Libya was truly shocking. Da'ish (ISIS), in the video it released accompanying the atrocity, claimed that their fighters were now just "south of Rome". They are using the term Rome generically for the 'West'. But it is somehow a symptom of the state the world.

Our discussions about conflict and human insecurity tend to focus on this type of religious or ethnic divides. Underlying power struggles and threats are largely overlooked. Today, I'd like to talk to you about environmental – particularly land - degradation. Because it has a huge impact on our collective security. It has not been afforded the strategic importance it deserves.

At this point, no country or region is immune to the effects of degradation. Climate change and land degradation in particular are amplifying and accelerating challenges. Forced migration, extremism and conflict are on the rise.

In an interconnected world - planning for between 9 and 10 billion people under a 2 degrees plus climate change scenario, competition for access to finite natural resources is becoming ever more intense. In the near future, competition will be most fierce for those resources that provide us with our basic needs – land for food and water.

FAO estimates that food demand, in terms of calories, will rise by 70% from current levels by 2050. Population growth means the share of productive land available per person will continue to decrease. In 1960, there was about half a hectare of farmland for every human. Now there is less than a third of that. **It is a ticking time bomb.**

To meet the growing need, we may need to convert between 4 hectares per year for production. Or we will need to produce more from less.

**But this will be a real challenge when:**

- 24 % of the world's usable lands are degraded [this figure goes up to 52% of land under agriculture]. The latest IPCC report estimates, yields might decline by up to 2% per decade globally. Crop yields could fall by up to 50% in the most vulnerable African countries.
- In Mali, economic simulations project this might translate into agricultural GDP losses as high as 30%.
- By 2025, up to 2.4 billion people worldwide may be living in areas subject to periods of intense water scarcity.

In any competition there are winners and losers. In terms of the effects of climate change and degradation, the losers will inevitably be the poorest

and most vulnerable in society. They will become desperate people, looking for a “way-out”.

**Migration is one way out.**

If water and food resources in a region decrease to the extent that local people can no longer feed their families, they can try and adapt how they live and what they grow. If they cannot adapt enough but still have some resources, they will migrate. They will move to regions where they hope to find sufficient freshwater and food.

Migration is therefore the most frequent way of adapting to climate change and land degradation. An estimated 42% of households migrate seasonally in the event of poor harvests, while 17% migrate when there is crop destruction and 13% leave due to natural disasters, such as extreme droughts.

We are moving from a pattern of seasonal migration to a pattern of permanent environmental forced migration. The projected scale of environmental forced migration in the coming decades will exceed anything experienced previously. Estimates suggest that by 2020, 60 million people could have moved from degraded parts of sub-Saharan Africa towards Europe and North Africa.

Lampedusa, in particular, has become (in)famous as the place people flee to escape insecurity and conflict, economic and environmental pressure. In the first seven months of 2014, more than 87,000 people arrived in Italy by sea.

We do not expect the trends to be reversed.

The UK Ministry of Defence estimates 135 million people will migrate as a result of desertification by 2045. Estimates on the total number of people likely to be displaced by climate change between now and 2050 vary from 250 million to a billion people.

**If migration is not an option, extremism and conflict is another way out.**

Migration is often not possible for the poorest parts of society. If there is no support coming from the authorities, people are forced into an unpleasant corner.

One example is in the Lake Chad region. In just 5 years, the Lake Chad region has become a hot-bed of Boko Haram terrorist activities. Lake Chad is a critical wetland area. In times of drought, it serves as a seasonal migration area for people from Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. But the population has grown rapidly – from 22 million in 1991 to 38 million by 2012. It is forecast to

reach 50m in 2020. Under pressure, the lake has receded into Chad. It shrank from about 25,000 sq km in 1963 to less than 1,400 square kilometres by 2001. Agriculture, the lifeline of the local economy, declined just as demand for food rose. The population became poorer and more marginalized.

Nigeria, for example, used to be a food exporter. As agriculture in the Region collapsed, the country now needs to import food. 90% of all the livestock in Nigeria was concentrated in the 11 northern states that we consider severely affected by desertification. Internal migration accelerated. This led to clashes among farmers; between farmers and pastoralists as well as between land-users and fisher folk. Northern Nigeria has suffered more than 100 violent conflicts, of varying intensities, since 2003.

In the Sahel, Horn of Africa and across much of the Middle East, the story is much the same. But while international hot-spots [Lake Chad, Sahel, Horn of Africa, Middle East] grab the lion's share of attention, conflicts do not only occur between states.

**Violent conflict can erupt between different interests or ethnic groups - inside national boundaries. There have been some dramatic examples in recent years.**

In 2008, food insecurity and dramatic food price rises triggered more than 60 food riots in 30 different countries. 10 of which resulted in multiple deaths.<sup>1</sup>

In Darfur, [Arab] nomads clashed with [African] sedentary farmers. This is the essential feature of conflict in the Sahel region. UN estimates suggest there have been up to 300,000 deaths since 2003.

Between 2006 and 2010, Syria suffered the worst drought in its history. The drought destroyed 60% of Syrian farms, with farmers losing 80% of their livestock. This drove 1 million environmental refugees into the cities already crowded with the million refugees who had taken shelter there from the Iraq War. Though the hellish and ongoing civil war in Syria has multiple causes - their climate-related drought may have been the biggest underlying trigger for the conflict.

**So what can or should be done to respond to this bleak picture?:**

**Giving desperate and disenfranchised communities some more options would dramatically reduce tension. There are practical steps that can be taken.**

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<sup>1</sup> UNCCD, "Desertification; the invisible frontline", 2014  
[http://www.unccd.int/Lists/SiteDocumentLibrary/Publications/NEW\\_Invisible\\_%20Front\\_Line\\_%20EN.pdf](http://www.unccd.int/Lists/SiteDocumentLibrary/Publications/NEW_Invisible_%20Front_Line_%20EN.pdf)

Early warning and early intervention – that reduces the risk of drought and food insecurity and prevents social conflict - is far cheaper than relying on relief and military means to respond to the resulting crises.

Sustainable land management can stop the loss of productive assets. It is a low cost, employment creating option. It empowers the disenfranchised in the poorest rural communities in the most vulnerable societies.

**Global targets** like a Land Degradation Neutrality aimed at preventing future land degradation, scaling up good land management practices, rehabilitating abandoned land and restoring natural ecosystems should be incentivized. There are more than 500 million hectares of abandoned agricultural land that could be brought back into production for food security [and to recover important ecosystem services such as clean air or water regulation]. In total, there are up to 2 billion hectares of land which still hold the potential for restoration and rehabilitation.

**The practical steps and simple techniques needed are low cost to do!** It costs US\$25 to US\$65 to rehabilitate a hectare of degraded land in Niger [and up to just US\$300 per hectare in other parts of the developing world]. Humanitarian assistance of 161million USD in 2011 could have secured 3-7 million hectares - out 15 million hectares of arable land in Niger.

**To my mind, this simple land based approach would give us a number of important advantages.**

As we move towards the Climate Change negotiations in Paris in 2015, we could sequester a huge amount of carbon – up to 30% - and buy valuable time – up to 30 years - for a transition to a low carbon economy. Using the same techniques, we can reduce food insecurity and make communities resilient to drought/climate change.

### **Conclusion**

European countries will be directly impacted by these pressures – migration and conflict in particular.

Member states, especially those on the front line like Italy, should integrate insights concerning land degradation and climate change into their development, immigration and security policies. More emphasis should be put on measures aimed at land restoration, sustainable agriculture and water management. This would improve environmental conditions and food security.

I would encourage Italy to stress the importance of soils as carbon sinks in the negotiations under the UNFCCC and advocate for the inclusion of land

into the new climate agreement at the end of 2015 more generally. It is both a mitigation and adaption measure.

Italy could advocate for the inclusion of land degradation neutrality into the Sustainable Development Goals. You are already testing the feasibility of the concept here as part of a UNCCD pilot project. We need to turn it into reality on the ground and in migration and security hot-spots.

Italy could ensure its domestic and European immigration policy is seeing the bigger picture. Addressing some of the root causes of migration. Giving people an option to stay in their homes and communities because their land is healthy and productive. And because they see they have a future.

I don't believe in silver bullets. In an inter-connected world, a package of measures that looks at the whole problem is vital. It must give desperate people options. With that in mind, we can no longer ignore the climate and environmental drivers of insecurity and poverty. In the future, land must be a key part of any development and well-thought through package.

Thank you.

