

**Statement by Grégoire de Kalbermatten
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on the occasion of the

**High-Level Conference on World Food Security:
The Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy
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Greetings to participants,

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

A UNCCD PERSPECTIVE ON THE CONTEXT

We are gathering at a moment when the entire world turns to our hosting institution.

- We are facing sharp global rise in food prices that affect particularly the poorest countries of the developing world. We have learned that within one year, world food prices have risen roughly 50 percent, there are serious shortages of rice, wheat and maize; and that over 20 countries in Africa are facing severe food security crisis. As media reports on food riots in a number of cities, the impact of high-priced food is painfully visible.
- Experts' debate on the respective roles of high oil prices as the major immediate cause of the rising food costs, and of the growing demand for bio fuels leading to reduction in food production. We very much welcome the analytical work of the FAO in this context.
- Whether bio-fuels are threats or opportunities, let us return down to earth, let us return to the basics. Are we recognizing that the key factor for food security in the future will be land use and its productivity? Are we agreeing with the Secretary General of the UN that, beyond feeding the hungry now, we need to secure the conditions for sustainable food production tomorrow? If so, can we see that the necessary longer-term strategy to address the food crisis must include a systemic policy focus on maintaining or increasing land ecosystem services productivity. And if so can we conclude that securing the conditions for sustainable agriculture productivity should be the

cornerstone of pro-poor policies in view of adaptation and mitigation to climate change?

If we care to answer these questions, we may finally come to the conclusion that the neglect of the implementation of the UNCCD would not be that benign after all. Let me be more specific.

LAND, SOIL FERTILITY AND CARBON

- Land degradation and the widespread loss of fertile topsoil in terms of quality and quantity are not a sudden event, but creeping disasters. Similarly, I recalled at our last COP on Madrid that drought is a silent but effective killer.
- The effect of soil degradation is often not conspicuous, but nevertheless potentially very damaging, considering on one hand the soil's slow formation rate – one cm of topsoil takes from 100 to 400 years to form - and on the other side the irreplaceable value of soil in respect of maintaining ecosystem services and securing sustainable livelihood. At the same time, under aggravated conditions of erosion, deforestation of over grazing, soil can be flushed down slopes in a few seasons.
- Global attention to climate change opens new perspectives to the importance of land management. Carbon as plant organic matter is sequestered in soils, and consequently soils contain more carbon than is contained in vegetation and the atmosphere combined. However, soil's organic carbon levels in many agricultural areas have been severely depleted, partially due to land use changes.

- There are a number of methods that significantly enhance carbon sequestration in soil, including no-till farming, residue mulching, and crop rotation. Also the use of bio char as a soil amendment has produced interesting results. While these methods are widely recognized by the scientific community, they are yet to be applied at a large scale, and thus provide major potential for enhanced carbon sequestration. The overall effect of carbon sequestration is beneficial for soil fertility since it adds more organic carbon to it and leads to improved soil properties.
- Indeed, increased attention to land and soil in the negotiation tables leading to the next climate change Conference in Denmark would not only enrich the substantive and conceptual debates on effective means for carbon sequestration. It would also provide a new and a highly motivating platform for developing countries to take ownership of the adaptation and mitigation agendas, considering that for many of them soil is the single most important natural resource for sustainable development.
- One concrete way forward would be to expand the coverage of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) towards agricultural land use, to include projects focusing on carbon sequestration in soil. Such projects would create added value through their simultaneous impact on land fertility.
- A key question in better linking soil and carbon sequestration concerns the development of an appropriate baseline and monitoring methodology. This is a matter that requires solid scientific background, and cooperation and partnerships between interested stakeholders. The UNCCD secretariat looks forward to collaborating on this issue.

- A related issue will be to support to capacities of developing country governments to bring their land related concerns effectively forth in the climate change negotiation process, so as to ensure that an emerging consensus can shape the post-2012 agreement in ways that are responsive to their priorities.

THE 10 YEARS UNCCD STRATEGY, AN OPPORTUNITY FOR AGRICULTURE

- The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, UNCCD, is an international instrument for matters relating to land and soil, particularly in the poorest dryland areas. It is one of the so-called Rio Convention, thus a 'sister convention' to the conventions on climate change and biodiversity.
- A positive resolve to stimulate UNCCD implementation was expressed last September in Madrid, as Parties to the Convention adopted the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008-2018). It focuses strategically on people, ecosystems, global benefits and resources, emphasizing once more that the UNCCD is an essential bridge between sustainable livelihoods and resources conservation.
- The new strategy targets the use of effective and practical approaches to sustainable land management that is becoming increasingly urgent in the face of the ongoing food security crisis. For instance, the Strategy is aiming at:
 - Improving and diversifying the livelihood base and benefits from income generated from sustainable land management;

- Reducing populations' socio-economic and environmental vulnerability to climate change, climate variability and drought;
 - Enhancing land productivity and other ecosystem goods and services in affected areas in a sustainable manner;
 - Reducing the vulnerability of affected ecosystems to climate change, climate variability and drought;
 - Contributing to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the mitigation of climate change through sustainable land management and combating desertification.
- We need to greatly intensify efforts on combating the impacts of DLDD desertification, land degradation and drought in areas affected by this emerging global crisis. Global rise in food prices will continue to grow should the context of natural resources scarcity further deteriorate. Those whose memory is long enough can indeed record instances of policies and measures taken under the trading regimes of the global market, which contributed to the vulnerability of local food production systems and the hunger of the poor.
- Please, let us not face this crisis now by launching a new cycle of dependencies. Subsidizing agricultural inputs or food aid will not do the trick. Let us also think in structural terms. **Measures on sustainable land management and soil protection are to be implemented under a clear strategy of returning investments to rural areas and restoring a measure of food sovereignty to countries.**

HUMAN RIGHTS

- The world food crisis has brought into the spotlights another important aspect of natural resource scarcity, namely that of endangering human rights. Many of the ongoing conflicts and crises, including in the Darfur region, have been considered also as results of the impact of serious drought, desertification and land degradation with rising conflict over deteriorating resources. Together with the Special UN Rapporteur on the Right to Food, UNCCD has issued a study on this topic released at the 16th session of the CSD last may in New York.

- Indeed enforcement of national normative frameworks and tools for sustainable management of natural resources can respond to the Parties specific and urgent needs, while addressing as well the economic and social rights of rural communities. These legislative instruments can thus make an important contribution to reaching the MDGs. Market approaches gain to be complemented by entitlement approaches if one is to prevent the disruptive emergence of public security issues.

IN CONCLUSION

It has often be said that Rome based institutions are the natural partners of the UNCCD. Let us mine this capital for integrated/systemic action and conclude in proposing four concrete avenues to explore:

1. We appeal to the host country of the next UNFCCC COP and like-minded countries to facilitate an initiative that will concretely put land and soil on the map of the mitigation and adaptation agendas.

2. The High Level Policy Dialogue that took place in Bonn on 19th May raised a number of issues on the implementation of the UNCCD Strategy of interest to FAO such as the options of an IPCC report on land and Soil and the establishment of an International Panel on land and Soil. In these as in so many other matters of the UNCCD Strategy, FAO thought leadership and advice is needed.

3. We also welcome a driving role of FAO and IFAD in joining UNEP and UNCCD in supporting the efforts of the Environmental Management Group to launch an interagency cooperation network on land in which FAO should play a key role.

4. We see merits in enhanced cooperation with FAO and concerned institutions in providing our 193 parties with an assessment of the extent to which measures taken under the agriculture sectoral programmes of multilateral financing institutions have taken into account combating DLDD and, as appropriate, to actualize an estimate of the cost of non action.