

UNITED NATIONS



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**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**MESSAGE ON WORLD DAY TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION**

**17 June 2014**

*“Land belongs to the future, let us climate-proof it”*

Land degradation, caused or exacerbated by climate change, is not only a danger to livelihoods, but also a threat to peace and stability. The warning signs lie in conflict between pastoralists and subsistence farmers competing for more productive land and communities fighting over increasingly scarce water resources. We see the symptoms of insecurity in global food market volatility, internal displacement and mass migration.

While land degradation is acutely felt in the world’s arid lands, some 80 per cent is actually occurring outside these areas. More than 1.5 billion people subsist on land that is degrading – the majority of whom are small farmers. Climate change directly threatens their productivity. In many regions, freshwater resources are declining, food-growing areas are shifting and crop yields are faltering.

Globally, unpredictable and extreme weather is predicted to have an even greater impact on food production. With world population rising, it is urgent that we work to build the resilience of all productive land resources and the communities that depend on them. We need to manage the land sustainably, avoid further degradation, and reclaim and repair that which has been damaged. More than 2 billion hectares of land have potential for restoration and rehabilitation. We need to inspire action that will prompt the recovery of these areas.

Recovering land that is degrading will have multiple benefits. We can avert the worst effects of climate change, produce more food and ease competition over resources. We can preserve vital ecosystem services, such as water retention, which protects us from floods or droughts. And a comprehensive and large-scale approach to land recovery can create new jobs, business opportunities and livelihoods, allowing populations to not only survive but thrive.

The theme of this year’s World Day to Combat Desertification is “Land belongs to the future, let’s climate-proof it”. It can be done, as communities in Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali have shown by recovering more than 5 million hectares of degraded land. Let us take inspiration from these and other examples and protect and nurture the land for this and future generations.