

Special Segment of the Eighth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

“Desertification and adaptation to climate change”

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Madame Chair, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The World Conservation Union - IUCN welcomes the opportunity to address the Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD.

The theme addressed by this Special Segment is of great importance and we would like to emphasize the strong nexus between combating poverty and desertification, meeting the challenges of climate change, and conserving dryland ecosystem services.

IUCN welcomes and supports the new ten-year strategic plan for the Convention, which provides a critical point to move decisively into the implementation of its provisions. As the UNCCD enters its second decade and as climate change becomes perhaps the greatest challenge in drylands, concerted efforts and active partnerships are needed more than ever to achieve implementation at all levels.

In this context, IUCN urges Parties to the Convention, with meaningful participation of civil society, to:

1. *Recognize* the significant contributions of drylands to national economies and local livelihoods, moving away from the negative notion of drylands as wastelands. Land degradation in drylands in all continents, aggravated by climate change, will not only affect the rural poor, but will hamper economic development at national and regional levels. There is a need for more coherent valuation of dryland ecosystem services and to integrate these values into national economic planning processes. This would also support long term solutions for sustainable energy and agriculture.

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2. *Support improved drylands governance.* The current governance situation in many drylands can exacerbate both ecosystem degradation and livelihood insecurity. There is an urgent need to solve inequitable tenure and rights regimes, strengthen democratic decision-making, promote peace and help resolve natural resource-based conflicts. It is essential to empower indigenous and local communities, including pastoralists, in land use planning and decision-making, to enhance their security and guarantee their fundamental rights to water, food and health. Proper recognition and support to traditional management practices, which are adapted to high variability of climate in drylands, could also enhance ecosystem resilience to climate change.
3. *Apply the lessons from the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment to adaptation and mitigation to climate change in drylands.* The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment demonstrates the importance of ecosystem services in the achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals, including halving extreme poverty by 2015. IUCN is committed to supporting UNCCD implementation by bringing the findings of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment into policy making and practice. This framework also contributes to moving beyond assessments to providing a rationale for sustainable investments in drylands. IUCN believes that this can also help in promoting enhanced synergies between the UNCCD and other Rio Conventions as well as the Commission on Sustainable Development.

IUCN brings together members from governments and civil society, as well as a vast network of experts, and can contribute to facilitate dialogue, develop active partnerships for practical implementation and strengthen the science-base of the Convention. Building on existing experience, IUCN is developing a Global Drylands Initiative to leverage partnerships on the ground, in areas such as sustainable dryland ecosystem management for livelihood security, dryland economics and valuation, and adaptation to climate change that should contribute to the implementation of the Convention.

I would like to conclude by thanking and congratulating the Government of Spain, which is a long-standing partner and supporter of IUCN, for hosting the COP and for its leadership in addressing desertification and land degradation.

We reaffirm our commitment to work with our members and partners on the implementation of the 10-year strategic plan, and to bring the CCD issues to the IUCN World Conservation Congress to be held in October 2008 in Barcelona, to which we, on behalf of our Director General, extend an invitation to all of you, so that we can together demonstrate progress and harness active partnerships in support of the Convention.

Thank you.

Created in 1948, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) brings together 82 States, 111 Government agencies, 800 plus NGO's, and some 10,000 scientists and experts from 181 countries in a unique worldwide partnership.

IUCN's mission is to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable.

IUCN is the world's largest environmental knowledge network and has helped over 75 countries to prepare and implement national conservation and biodiversity strategies. IUCN is a multicultural, multilingual organization with 1,000 staff located in 62 countries.