



Remarks made by Mr. Aeneas Chuma,  
Resident Representative  
United Nations Development Program  
and  
the United Nations Resident Coordinator  
in Kenya On the  
World Day to Combat Desertification at  
Eor Ekule Primary School  
on 17th June 2010  
in Narok District, Rift Valley Province

**The Honourable Minister**

**The Honourable Assistant Minister**

**The Permanent Secretary**

**The Provincial Commissioner**

**Members of the NEMA Board**

**Invited Guests**

**All protocols observed**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

**Theme: “Rich soils biodiversity leads to Better livelihoods”.**

As has been our practice over the past years, it is my pleasure on behalf of all UN agencies and on behalf of UNDP, to participate in this years’ commemoration of World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought. You may be aware that:

In December 1994, the United Nations General Assembly declared June 17 the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought. The assembly acknowledged that desertification and drought were global problems because they affected all regions of the world. The assembly also realized that joint action by the international community was needed to combat desertification and drought, particularly in Africa.

States were invited to devote the World Day to promoting awareness of the need for international cooperation to combat desertification and the effects of drought, and on the implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification. Since

then, country parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), including Kenya, non-governmental organizations and other interested stakeholders celebrate this particular day with outreach activities worldwide on June 17 each year. Celebrating this event annually is one of the activities of the UNDP UNEP Poverty Environment Initiative (PEI) project. PEI works with the Ministry of Environment through NEMA to organize and finance the activities.

As you may all be aware, the Year 2010 has been earmarked as the International Year of Biodiversity by the UN General Assembly. The theme for this year's WDCD is "Rich soils biodiversity leads to Better livelihoods." The theme was selected to emphasize the relationship between soil and biodiversity during this year. It is part of the international campaign to tackle global environmental deterioration, especially deterioration of the drylands. It aims to sensitize the public to the fact that desertification, land degradation and drought dramatically affect the biodiversity resident in the soils.

Biodiversity is crucial to development and the reduction of poverty because of the goods and ecosystem services it provides such as food, freshwater, fibre, medicine and fuel. For these to be provided, other more invisible ecosystem services called supporting and regulating services such as pollination, soil formation, nutrient cycle, climate and water regulation are also provided. These are critical for food production processes in agriculture, livestock, forestry and fishery. Most people living in the rural areas of Kenya depend directly on local ecosystems for their daily livelihoods. Without sufficient access to useable land, water, domesticated

and wild plants and animal species provided by local ecosystems, human life would not survive.

Agriculture and agricultural biodiversity account for at least 45% of Kenya's GDP. Agricultural biodiversity provides not only food and income but also raw materials for clothing, shelter and medicines in addition to maintaining soil fertility, biota and water conservation.

The choice of venue for this year's WDCD was also determined by the critical place that the Mau catchment areas play in Kenya's efforts to protect and conserve the biodiversity found in there that supports the economic life and livelihoods of many Kenyans as well as other people in the region, along the River Nile and all the way to Egypt. Narok / The Mau region is also one of the areas in Kenya where charcoal production and trade is an important livelihood activity.

Unsustainable Charcoal production contributes to destruction of ecosystem integrity. The GOK has legalised charcoal trade and provided legislation that will guide the production and sell of charcoal. A copy of this regulation and guidelines is available at the Government printers at a cost of Kshs 80 only. UNDP through GEF funding is developing a Kenyan programme with a regional component aimed at developing mechanisms that will enable sustainable production of charcoal whilst protecting the environment. This programme will also introduce alternative livelihood options to the communities that have only depended on the charcoal trade. Cross border efforts will enable protection of the ecosystem in the whole region.

Biodiversity and climate change are closely linked and each impacts upon the other. Biodiversity is threatened by human induced climate change but biodiversity resources can reduce the impacts of climate change on population and ecosystems, especially in the very fragile Drylands.

Desertification leads to biodiversity loss in a number of ways causing habitat degradation, reducing ecosystem productivity and enabling the spread of invasive alien species. Such biodiversity loss threatens ecosystem services vital for the livelihoods of millions of people, in Kenya and in most other parts of Africa. The loss of biodiversity undermines the health of dryland ecosystems and makes them more vulnerable to desertification. Food security is also threatened by desertification and biodiversity loss. Almost two thirds of Kenya's arid and semi-arid lands are very vulnerable to desertification and drought. Climate change is expected to further increase the vulnerability of these areas by expanding exposure to wind, water and soil erosion, prolonged drought and wild fires. Drylands ecosystems are particularly vulnerable to climate change. The combined effect of climate change, desertification land degradation and biodiversity loss will have unprecedented and far reaching implications to all people but especially more so to the poorer segments of the Kenyan society.

Climate change presents a very real threat to Kenya's economic development. There is already evidence that climate change is undermining efforts by the country to reduce poverty and achieve its development aspirations. Climate change impacts are being felt across all sectors including environment, development, health, human rights and other key areas of national economy.

An analysis of climate change and its risks by UNFCCC's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change indicates that climate change impacts will hit hardest the poorest regions and the poorest people - who have least resources for facing changes brought about by climate change induced incidences such as droughts, floods and storms.

UNDP and our development partners are currently cooperating with the GoK to support its efforts in addressing climate change. Together we have committed Kshs. 509 million to Adaptation and Mitigation programmes. Recently the National Climate Change Response Strategy was launched. Experience tells us that successful effort to help vulnerable communities deal with the negative effects of climate change can only work if they are responsive to local needs and realities.

The United Nations Development Programme's contributes to bettering the biodiversity by Strengthening Partnerships for sustainable development in all areas including responsible exploitation of biodiversity for improved livelihoods towards Vision 2030 and MDGs. UNDP also supports the Government of Kenya in mainstreaming initiatives for biodiversity/environmental concerns in policy, planning and budgeting for poverty reduction.

It is the culture of the UNDP to Share knowledge and best practices from experiences in the 166 countries of the world where UNDP has a presence. We use this experience in our programming. UNDP builds the Capacity of the government officials in their efforts aimed at reducing desertification, land degradation and drought as well as the capacity to promote peaceful and inclusive

management of land and natural resources in areas that are vulnerable to natural and man-made disasters.

In the past years, UNDP supported the government in the development of the NEAP/DEAPs and their links to biodiversity and the Dry lands. UNDP also has direct links with community activities through support to projects and programmes that help communities to protect and conserve biodiversity

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to conclude by saying that addressing desertification is critical and essential to meeting the Millennium Development Goals because it will facilitate the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger and will also ensure environmental sustainability, both goals envisioned in the MDGs. This is the only way we shall save ourselves and our dry lands environment for now and for posterity!

*THANK YOU*