



*Kenya*

## **Remarks**

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**On the World Day to Combat Desertification  
on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2007 in Marigat, Baringo  
District**

**The Honorable Minister**  
**The Permanent Secretary**  
**The Provincial Commissioner**  
**Invited Guests**  
**Ladies and Gentlemen**

**Theme: Desertification and Climate Change- One Global Challenge**

We are grateful for the opportunity UNDP has been given to be part of the commemoration of this very important day - the World Day to Combat Desertification. 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. The theme this year is "Desertification and Climate Change - One Global Challenge". It highlights not only the significant synergy between the two environmental issues, but also their common objective of sustainable development.

Desertification is a process of land degradation, partly due to human-induced factors. Activities such as over-cultivation, over-grazing, deforestation and poor irrigation practices are turning once-fertile soils into barren patches of land. It has enormous economic and social costs and can lead to poverty, forced migration and conflict.

Another major contributing factor, however, is climate change. Extreme climatic events such as floods and droughts are becoming more frequent and more drastic in their effects. Severe drought is compounding the existing problem of desertification in the dry lands. Two thirds that includes this

community and many other parts of Kenya, of the worlds poor live in these areas and it is they who are suffering most from the double blow of desertification and climate change as they struggle to eke out a living from the land.

Desertification also contributes to climate change, with land degradation and related loss of vegetation resulting in increased emissions and reduced carbon sink. Therefore, restoration of dry land conditions could have a major impact on global climate patterns.

Desertification and climate change are interlinked in multiple ways. They represent two faces of the same global environmental challenge facing us in the 21st century. A synergistic approach is therefore the most effective way to tackle them. It will bring greater benefits both to our environment and to those whose livelihood depends on it. This is the important message that the World Day celebration aims to reinforce.

Desertification occurs on all continents except Antarctica and affects the livelihoods of millions of people, including a large proportion of the poor in dry lands. Assessment of the extent of desertification varies, but even by conservative estimates, it ranks among today's greatest environmental challenges with serious local and global impacts.

Here in Kenya, close to 80% of the land surface is Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASAL). This area is home to about 10 million people who live under difficult conditions where the level of poverty is high and widespread. It is

therefore appropriate that today we are in Baringo which is one of Kenya's ASAL districts, to commemorate World Desertification Day.

**Ladies and gentlemen,** climate change reflected as global warming is also affecting people across Kenya. Our arid and semi-arid areas are becoming drier. Research studies indicate that, the African continent on average is 0.5 C warmer than it was a thousand years ago, but temperatures have risen much higher in some areas of Kenya which have become 3.5C hotter in the past 20 years.

It is therefore important to empower and support communities on mitigation measures and essential adaptation technologies. This involves building on communities coping strategies to live the now unavoidable with climate change and empowering them to participate in the development of climate change policies and programmes.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,** allow me to applaud the Government of Kenya's efforts in acknowledging and recognizing that the country's economic growth and well-being of its people is largely reliant on the sustained provision of life-dependent natural resources from its natural environment. Kenya's main economic productive sectors – agriculture, tourism, fisheries and forestry – are based on the utilization of natural resources. Similarly, the livelihoods of rural populations are based on the access and use of productive natural resources while urban population livelihoods are affected by the state of the environment. In this regard, The UN notes that the Government of Kenya is committed to ensuring that the resources in Kenya's environment are utilized in a sustainable manner to support the current and future generations.

We recognize and appreciate the Government's partnership with the United Nations and note that Kenya is host to the United Nations Environment Programme headquarters as well as the headquarters for the UNDP's Dry lands Development Center. Kenya's commitment is also reflected by her commitments to international conventions and programmes (e.g. World Summit for Sustainable Development, 1992), after which the Government enacted the Environment Management and Coordination Act (EMCA, 1999). More recently, within the context of the Government's Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation (ERSWEC), Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) and commitments to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Government is now engaged in carrying forward practical initiatives aimed at achieving economic growth based on sound environmental management that include tackling desertification issues.

As a UN body, we are proud to be partners in these initiatives and this is evidenced by our support of;

- Formulation of the ASAL policy; The UN looks forward to the finalization of this very important document which focuses on the overall sustainable development of the ASALs
- The ongoing formulation of the National Environmental Policy
- Payment for Environmental Services Initiatives
- Improvement on marketing access for ASAL commodities such as *jatropha, aloe* plants etc
- The ongoing formulation of Land Tenure policy

**Ladies and Gentlemen,** I see two main dimensions to the issue of saving the dry lands that we all must focus on. Firstly, the opportunities and the challenges in the dry lands for all the stakeholders including the inhabitants themselves and development agents such as UN agencies. I would like to briefly touch on the opportunities that exist for improving livelihoods and reducing the endemic poverty in these areas. We have a pool of human resource-the people themselves. The people must be taught and made aware of the choices available to them in their local situations as well as the consequences of alternative actions or inaction from their part. Local exploitation and management practices that blend local/indigenous knowledge and experience with improved and modern knowledge and that together promote sustainability must be advocated for. Secondly, partnership of the local people with the government and local development agencies as well as the private sector could improve the people's capacity to act, could lead to the harnessing of resources towards poverty reduction and control of desertification.

**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!

Lastly, I take great pleasure in recognizing the good work done by community based organizations in Kenya and specifically here in Marigat. Our host community today, the **Kailer Village Development Committee**

has done very impressive work and has taken a lead in combating desertification and engaged in activities on other environmental issues .The United Nations Development Programme appreciates the good work and would like to encourage the community to keep up this good work and urge other Community Based Organizations to emulate them. As a token of appreciation, I would like on behalf of United Nations Development Programme to hand over a cheque of Ksh 300, 000. This is to support the community towards the implementation of their action plan on water development.

**THANK YOU**