

**Message of Luc Gnacadja
Executive Secretary
United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification**

**International Day for Biological Diversity
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“Water and Biodiversity”

Water scarcity is one of the increasing challenges for the growing human population. It is especially pressing in the world’s drylands, where frequent, intense and prolonged droughts put additional burden on an already over-stretched water system.

Drylands are often seen as being devoid of life, but in fact, they contain a great variety of biodiversity. Almost half of the world’s cultivated plants, among them cabbage, wheat, rye and barley, originate from the drylands. Some drylands, such as North America’s tall grass prairie, are among the most productive areas of the world.

One should also not forget soil biodiversity. A diverse range of organisms in the soil are responsible for its formation, quality and health, maintaining water and nutrients for plants and for naturally regulating the climate by fixing carbon.

Land degradation and climate change can have irreversible negative impact on drylands biodiversity. Animals dependent on vegetation migrate to other areas in search of food or risk disappearing altogether. Disappearance of animal and plant species, which are usually well adapted to the extreme climatic conditions, signals significant ecosystem degradation.

Thankfully, during the last year’s UN Conference for Sustainable Development (Rio+20), governments recognized the urgent need to reverse land degradation and committed to “strive to achieve a land-degradation neutral world in the context of sustainable development.” To achieve this aspirational goal, land degradation should be avoided and already degraded should be restored.

Only by taking a holistic approach to effective land and water management, can we preserve biodiversity and achieve food, water and energy security. Therefore, my call on the International Day of Biological Diversity is “Don’t let our future dry up”. Let us make sure that land and water take their deserved place in the post 2015 development agenda.

“Water and biodiversity” for this year’s International Day of Biological Diversity theme also recognizes the UN designation of 2013 as the International Year of Water Cooperation.

This is an opportune moment for the international community to renew its commitment to mobilize resources for sustainable land and water management.

Congratulations to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) for their unceasing efforts to raise public awareness on this vital issue. I look forward to further strengthening our long-term joint effort for promoting sustainable land and water use as the means to preserve drylands biodiversity.

