Statement

by

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Overview of the Impact of Desertification and Land degradation on the Development Prospects of Landlocked Developing Countries

Ankara, Turkey, 19 October 2015
• Excellencies,
• Distinguished Delegates
• Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, let me thank you all for coming to this important event organized to analyze and suggest ways and means to achieve land degradation neutrality in the Landlocked Developing Countries. My Office is appreciative of the excellent partnership with UNCCD and we hope to continue this in the years to come.

I would also like to sincerely thank you for your kind participation.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by giving an overview of landlocked developing countries and where they stand in some of the core development areas.

The United Nations has recognized 32 landlocked developing countries, widely dispersed around the globe: 16 are located in Africa, 12 in Asia, 2 in Central and Eastern Europe, 2 in Latin America.

Despite their location on four different continents, all landlocked developing countries share some common problems ranging from their geographic features, nature of economic engagement with the rest of the world entwined with transit related challenges, over dependence on narrow natural base, degraded land and desertification with high level of Agro dependent livelihood and high level of vulnerability to man-made and natural disasters. All of this has impacted upon their prospect for prosperity with the complex challenges of poverty, hunger and food and nutrition insecurity.

The geographic remoteness without maritime access implies heavy dependence on trade and on transport systems of neighboring countries. As a consequence, many LLDCs find themselves marginalized from the world economy, cut-off from the global flows of knowledge, technology, capital and innovations, and unable to benefit substantially from
external trade. This has resulted in less marketization, narrow production and export bases, leading to limited economic growth and persistent poverty.

A study undertaken by my office in 2013 on the development cost of being landlocked suggests that, on average, LLDCs are 20 per cent poorer their coastal country counterparts. A third of households in landlocked developing countries were living on less than $1.25 a day in 2002-2013. Poverty rates could be over 50 per cent in some LLDCs during the same period. Not surprisingly data from the World Bank 2014 Doing Business Report indicate that the cost of importing and exporting in LLDCs is almost three-fold than that of their transit neighbors. The average cost for such countries to export and import was $3,443 and $4,343, respectively, compared with $1,301 and $1,559 for transit developing countries.

In addition to remoteness from major market, cumbersome customs and border crossings procedures, limited infrastructure, missing links, inadequate transit facilities and inefficient logistics systems –among other things- result in higher transport and trade transaction costs, the structural vulnerabilities and limited productive capacities of LLDCs expose them disproportionately to the severe negative impacts of economic crisis and climate change.

Economies of landlocked developing countries are highly vulnerable to climate change, desertification and land degradation for a number of reasons:

Firstly, most of landlocked developing countries lack institutional, human capacity and resources to tackle these challenges.

Secondly, many of these countries are too dependent on climate-sensitive resources such as agriculture, livestock, forestry, water, fisheries, etc.

Thirdly, most landlocked developing countries are dependent on a few primary agricultural and/or mineral commodities and almost two thirds of population is still dependent on agriculture.

Lastly, many landlocked developing countries are located in dryland regions where the impacts of climate change, desertification and land degradation are more pronounced than anywhere else. In total, 54 per cent of total land in LLDCs is classified as dryland, and about 60 per cent of the population in LLDCs is located in drylands area. Botswana
and Burkina Faso are 99 per cent arid and dryland, while a sixth of the populations of Mali and Burkina Faso have been displaced from their homes and farmland by land degradation. Therefore, the location of LLDCs in drylands makes them more vulnerable to the impact of climate change, desertification and drought.

For example, from 2005 to 2014, severe and frequent droughts in Eastern and Southern Africa have resulted in food shortages, in Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Swaziland, and Ethiopia. Drought in the Sahel region caused severe famine in Niger and Chad. Drought also depresses hydroelectric power generation for example in Zambia. The Central Asian LLDCs, including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, have been affected by desertification owing to increasing water shortages, while Nepal has experienced massive degradation of arable land due to floods and storms. In addition, climate change has exacerbated land degradation, desertification and deforestation in landlocked developing countries. Of the 29 countries in the world that have a proportion of the population living on degraded land of 20 percent or greater, 13 are LLDCs. Such major impacts have negative impact on agricultural productivity. Low productivity implies low incomes and limited affordability of food, leading to a high incidence of poverty and low equilibrium trap.

Low productivity in agriculture is also symptomatic of difficulties of many LLDCs to initiate structural transformation, which is one of the priority areas of the Vienna Programme of Action.

In sum, land degradation, droughts and desertification hamper the ability of the LLDCs to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Unfortunately LLDCs have the least potential to adapt and mitigate to the impacts. They lack the necessary financial and technical capacities to mitigate and adapt to those impacts.

Reversing and preventing desertification, alongside mitigating the effects of drought, are crucial to reducing poverty and improving environmental sustainability in drylands. Drylands have some of the highest levels of poverty and hunger. The current famine ravaging some parts of Africa underscores the need to address the root causes of this crisis by building resilience and improving rural livelihoods with a view to minimizing the negative impact and the scale of any future crisis: droughts do not happen overnight. In many countries these areas also have a long history of neglect in investment and sustainable development interventions, having been marginalized from both development processes and political discourse. This marginalization cannot continue. In our
increasingly globalized and interconnected world, drylands are important to us all for climatic, economic and geopolitical reasons.

Even against all these challenges, there are also important best practices and lessons learned from the policies, practices and knowledge from each region. The successful examples need to be scaled up and supported by all. That is also the objective of this side event. Raising awareness, sharing experiences and promoting partnership with strong action on the ground.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Against this background, landlocked developing countries warmly welcomed the adoption of the Goal 15.3 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that aims at combating desertification, restoring degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and striving to achieve a land-degradation-neutral world in an inclusive manner.

The Vienna Programme of Action for landlocked developing countries for the decade 2014-2024, adopted in Vienna, Austria, in November 2014, came out with the six priorities for LLDCs.

Looking forward, I would like to call upon international community to enhance and support to landlocked developing countries, particularly those affected by climate change, desertification, land degradation and drought, which are key challenges to structural economic transformation and poverty eradication. This support will include access to already existing financing mechanisms such as: the adaptation fund, the global environmental facility, the Least Developed Countries Fund, the Special Climate Change Trust Fund, and others. I also support the proposal by UNCCD to establish a dedicated Land Degradation Neutrality Fund. For landlocked developing countries, this fund will represent an opportunity to achieve sustainable land management and reclaim degraded land.

More studies are also required to estimate the true extent and multi-dimensional impacts of climate change, desertification, land degradation and drought. In this regard, I would like to share with you some copies of the report that my Office prepared on the Impact of Climate Change, Desertification and Land Degradation on the Development Prospects of
the Landlocked Developing Countries. The report is also available on the website of my office.

Thank you for your kind attention.