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From: General Secretariat of the Council
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To: Delegations

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Subject: Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought
- Council conclusions (14 October 2024)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought, as approved by the Council at its 4050th meeting held on 14 October 2024.

Council Conclusions on Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought**THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

1. REITERATES its commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG target 15.3, to combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world by 2030;
2. RECALLS that desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) pose major environmental, economic, social and security challenges for sustainable development and NOTES WITH CONCERN the increased frequency and intensity of droughts and the exacerbation of desertification and land degradation globally and in the EU; STATES that the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is the corner stone of global efforts to tackle DLDD;
3. RECOGNISES the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships that bring together multilateral organisations, public administrations, civil society organisations (CSOs), the private sector, local communities, farmers, foresters, pastoralists and land managers, Indigenous Peoples and other land users, and alliances to combat DLDD and achieve Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN), and WELCOMES initiatives such as the International Drought Resilience Alliance, the Great Green Wall and its Accelerator, and the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists, which contribute to global efforts to build resilience to drought, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation;
4. RECALLS the Council Conclusions on the 8th Environment Action Programme Mid-term review – The way forward to a green, just and inclusive transition for a sustainable Europe, adopted in June 2024, and in particular their call for a systemic and coherent EU approach at international level to tackling climate change, pollution, deforestation, land degradation, land-take and biodiversity loss, especially through accelerating and scaling up implementation of nature-based solutions which have been defined by the 5th United Nations Environmental Assembly (UNEP/EA.5/Res.5);

STRENGTHENING EU COMMITMENTS IN ADDRESSING DLDD

5. RECALLS the Council Conclusions endorsing the recommendations on the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 33/2018 entitled 'Combating desertification in the EU: a growing threat in need of more action', and URGES the Commission to propose an integrated EU wide Action Plan to combat DLDD, aiming at building resilience to drought and achieving LDN in the EU by 2030, based on a full impact assessment;
6. WELCOMES the ambitious vision of the EU Soil Strategy for 2030 to have all EU soil ecosystems in a healthy condition by 2050 as a way of halting and reversing desertification and land degradation and sustaining the green water cycle that influences inland precipitation patterns and contributes to water conservation and resilience to droughts and floods, as well as the EU Mission 'A Soil Deal For Europe' under Horizon Europe and NOTES in this context the advancement of the discussions on the Commission's proposal for a Directive on Soil Monitoring and Resilience (Soil Monitoring Law);
7. EMPHASISES the need for the Commission and the Member States to implement the Nature Restoration Law, as a matter of priority, including nature-based solutions scaling up for regenerative land management and proactive drought management;
8. WELCOMES the ongoing efforts that are being made at EU level to identify subsidies harmful to the environment and HIGHLIGHTS the importance of taking their impacts on DLDD into consideration; EMPHASISES that ambitious goals should be set in the medium term to phase out or reform such subsidies;
9. RECOGNISES the interlinkage between land and water management; UNDERLINES the importance of an integrated approach to planning and management of droughts and semi-arid climatic conditions, and URGES the Member States at risk of drought and/or water scarcity, to elaborate Drought Management Plans as appropriate, coordinated with actions under and integrated into relevant policies, including general planning of relevant policy areas, in particular on water issues defined by the Water Framework Directive;
10. RECOGNISES that conservation of natural resources such as land and water is crucial to human security and that DLDD and water scarcity can increase the risk of forced displacements, instability, insecurity and conflict;

11. HIGHLIGHTS the ongoing support that the EU and its Member States are providing at global, regional and national level through external action instruments, such as the NDICI-Global Europe instrument and the Global Gateway; INVITES the EU and its Member States to raise the importance of regenerative land management and land governance in their external action and to continue to foster international partnerships and engagement on combatting DLDD;
12. EMPHASISES the importance of stepping up the further integration of DLDD in relevant policies and investment plans in land-related sectors of cooperation, in particular agriculture and food production (notably through agroecological and landscape approaches, including organic agriculture), land and urban planning, infrastructure and water management; RECOGNISES the potential of agroecology, forest landscapes and ecosystem restoration as an integrated, cross-cutting approach offering multiple benefits not only for soil- and land restoration and, fertility improvement, but also for biodiversity and ecosystems, carbon storage, adaptation to climate change, resource efficiency, food security and nutrition and economic development;
13. ACKNOWLEDGES the paramount importance of coherent financing in the pursuit of sustainable land management and land restoration; RECOGNISES the need to review financing from existing instruments and to tap alternative private and mixed funding sources, especially with the aim of operationalising DLDD actions and implementing ecosystem restoration actions based on the use of nature-based solutions;
14. STRESSES that regenerative land management practices, restoration efforts, and actions to halt deforestation and forest degradation by 2030 are key to achieving LDN globally. In this regard, it is important to achieve sustainable, traceable and transparent value chains that decouple agricultural production from deforestation and from forest and land degradation, recognising the importance of demand- and supply-side measures;
15. ACKNOWLEDGES the importance of the UN Early Warnings for All initiative in strengthening international cooperation and data integration on drought monitoring and forecasting;
16. UNDERLINES the importance of pursuing the WHO's 'One Health' approach in combating DLDD and enabling structural discussions on policy coherence between relevant sectors and disciplines at local, national, regional and international level;

EU PRIORITIES FOR THE 16th SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE UNCCD AND BEYOND

17. RECOGNISES with concern that pressure on global land resources is continuously increasing and NOTES that the dominant drivers for land degradation worldwide include among others the unsustainable management of natural resources, land use change, biodiversity loss, unsustainable agriculture and agricultural expansion, deforestation, urban sprawl, soil sealing, rural depopulation, pollution, climate change, and mining and quarrying;
18. WELCOMES the work and TAKES NOTE of the reports of the Intergovernmental Working Group (IWG) on Drought to identify options to enhance the proactive management of drought worldwide and of the IWG on the Mid-Term Evaluation of the UNCCD 2018-2030 Strategic Framework to identify priorities and develop recommendations for the second term of the UNCCD Strategic Framework;
19. STRESSES the need to enhance action at all levels to tackle DLDD and its drivers, notably by mainstreaming and scaling up identified and proven solutions to combating DLDD, including sustainable management of natural resources, circular economy, regenerative land management, agroforestry and sustainable grazing techniques, agro-ecological approaches, and proactive drought management;
20. In order to achieve LDN by 2030, URGES the transformation of agriculture and food systems to make them sustainable, drought-resilient and climate-smart, based on the 13 principles of agroecology defined by the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the FAO Committee on World Food Security; and UNDERLINES the relevance of the contribution of the Agroecology Coalition and the international ‘4 per 1000’ initiative;
21. EMPHASISES the need to strengthen the knowledge base of the UNCCD and improve the support provided via the Committee of Science and Technology to facilitate more informed decision-making; UNDERLINES the need to reinforce the provision of useful tools through the Science-Policy Interface (SPI), to enhance the collaboration and cooperation between the SPI, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and involve international and national scientific organisations, including academia, as well as other communities in the process;

22. STRESSES that an efficient and effective UNCCD Secretariat and a sound budget that is fit-for-purpose with due regard for cost effectiveness are preconditions for ensuring reliable administrative and financial management of the UNCCD; REITERATES the importance of taking into account the recommendations issued by the Joint Inspection Unit and in close dialogue with UNCCD Parties, in particular the principles of good governance, effectiveness, transparency, impartiality, accountability and risk management;
23. COMMENDS the good collaboration between the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the UNCCD, leading to the recent increase in GEF support to assist Country Parties in complying with their reporting obligations and implementing transformative projects and programmes to achieve LDN, including their voluntary LDN targets, and drawing up their national drought plan;
24. IS MINDFUL OF the upcoming 9th replenishment of the GEF (GEF-9) and ACKNOWLEDGES this as an opportunity for the UNCCD Conference of the Parties (COP) to request a significant share of the GEF-9 for the focal area ‘Land Degradation’, while encouraging co-benefits with the other four focal areas of the GEF;
25. UNDERSCORES, in line with the UNCCD COP-15 Abidjan Declaration on achieving gender equality for successful land restoration, the importance of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Women’s land tenure rights, their engagement in decision-making, planning and implementation processes, capacity-building and their access to value chains and financing tools need to be strengthened to ensure gender-responsive and transformative implementation of the UNCCD;
26. WELCOMES the convening of the Gender Caucus and Youth Caucus at UNCCD COP-16 as key platforms for advancing gender equality and intergenerational equity within the implementation of the Convention;
27. UNDERSCORES, in line with the CFS Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land Fisheries and Forests, the importance of secure tenure for sustainable development and combating DLDD;
28. HIGHLIGHTS the importance of the full and inclusive participation of Indigenous Peoples in decision-making processes in accordance with the right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent;

29. STRESSES that advancing youth participation is crucial to combating DLDD; UNDERLINES the need to empower youth through the necessary resources, training, platforms, and policy instruments so that they can effectively contribute to the UNCCD's mission;
30. HIGHLIGHTS the importance of a whole-of-society approach and of inclusive participation in decision-making and COMMITS to fostering an enabling environment that promotes the active participation and involvement of CSOs in the UNCCD; RECOGNISES the need to provide CSOs and the UNCCD CSO Panel with adequate resources and training so that they can effectively contribute to the UNCCD's mission;
31. WELCOMES the UN Code of Conduct to Prevent Harassment, Including Sexual Harassment, and CALLS for its unhindered application and implementation in all UNCCD processes, most notably during multilateral conferences;
32. INVITES the UNCCD COP to better consider the impact of harmful subsidies contributing to DLDD; and strongly ENCOURAGES it to place this topic on the agenda of the next COP in order to initiate a reflection on how to phase out such subsidies and repurpose them towards more sustainable land management practices thereby also contributing to implementing target 18 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (K-M GBF);

SYNERGIES WITH OTHER MULTILATERAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS AND INTERNATIONAL PROCESSES

33. RECOGNISES the interdependence and interlinkages between DLDD, climate change, biodiversity loss, water scarcity and pollution; AFFIRMS its commitment to addressing these emergencies in an effective, integrated and coherent way; HIGHLIGHTS the essential role of sustainable land management and land restoration and the need to address the water, food, health, land, biodiversity, climate, deforestation and pollution nexus in a strong, holistic and integrated manner that comprises mutually beneficial strategies, with strong social and environmental safeguards including through nature based solutions as defined by UNEP/EA.5/Res.5, and ecosystem-based approaches; STRESSES the need to minimise trade-offs and maximise synergies;

34. IS MINDFUL OF the fact that the 16th session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the 29th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the 16th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD are taking place back-to-back, which provides a unique opportunity for the Rio Conventions to mutually support each other, to contribute to the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the achievement of its SDGs and to address climate change, biodiversity loss and DLDD in a synergic manner;
35. IS STRONGLY COMMITTED to tackle biodiversity loss, ecosystem, land, water and ocean degradation, climate change and pollution in an effective and integrated way, and therefore, CALLS for closer and enhanced cooperation and strengthening the synergies among the three Rio Conventions and other multilateral agreements and initiatives at all levels, including financial institutions, other relevant UN initiatives and international processes;
36. CALLS FOR improved collaboration among the CBD, the UNFCCC and the UNCCD at all levels, particularly on the implementation of the K-M GBF, the Paris Agreement and the Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme, through better use of the Joint Liaison Group of the Rio Conventions, enhanced cooperation and synergies between their COPs in 2024 and beyond, with a view to also exploring the potential for joint work between the Conventions, and increased collaboration at national level, especially in the development, revision and implementation of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans, Nationally Determined Contributions, National Adaptation Plans, National Action Programmes, Voluntary National LDN Targets, National Drought Plans and National Food Systems Pathways;
37. Specifically on combatting deforestation and the need for enhancing conservation, restoration and sustainable management of forests, and mindful of the resolution of the 19th session of the UN Forum on Forests on the mid-term review of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests and subsequent FAO/COFO decisions, CALLS FOR better use to be made of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and for the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs to strengthen its nexus-oriented support activities to also enhance pro-active cross-sectoral action with the aim of combatting DLDD.