

**Press Release N°163/2013****AFRICA DAY: Ministers reconfirm Africa's commitment to ensure sustainable development through sustainable land management**

**Windhoek, 25 September 2013-** The African Union Commission (AUC) in collaboration with the NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency (NPCA) held the Africa Day high level meeting on, 25 September 2013 in Windhoek, Namibia. Under the theme *sustainable land management: Africa on the front line*, the high level meeting took place in the framework of the Eleventh Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP11). The event took place at the African Union pavilion.

The objective of the Africa Day was to showcase to the global community what Africa is doing in the domain of sustainable land management. The high level forum discussed issues related to the development of drylands, including sustainable land management (SLM), and drought mitigation from the African perspective within the context of sustainable development.

"Desertification, along with climate change and the loss of biodiversity are among the greatest challenges to sustainable development especially in developing countries, and in particular in Africa", said Dr. Khalil Timamy, Head of AUC delegation at COP11 of the UNCCD. He then stressed the urgent need for a strong global partnership to reverse and prevent desertification /land degradation as well as mitigating the effects of drought in affected areas in order to support poverty reduction and environmental sustainability.

Ms. Rudo Makunike, Head of NPCA delegation at COP 11 of the UNCCD said in her welcome remarks that "Africa's progress towards addressing the twin issues of drought and desertification and improving sustainable land management practices has gained considerable support from all stakeholders, particularly African governments and institutions over the last few years". However, these achievements, according to her, "need to be up scaled-up to realize the full socio-economic and environmental potential to the continent".

In addition to the support of the secretariat of the TerrAfrica Programme to African Regional Sustainable Land Management initiatives, Ms. Makunike reconfirmed the NPCA's "full commitment" to supporting African countries' initiatives aimed at "improving land productivity and combating the scourge of desertification".

In his opening remarks, H.E Mr. Uahekua Herunga, Minister of Environment and Tourism, Republic of Namibia whose country is President of the COP to the UNCCD

until 2015 stated that “there is indeed an African renaissance starting to take place in the drylands” in which Namibia is taking part.

He acknowledged the National Action Programmes under the UNCCD, in which good practice approaches have reversed by 2012 the trends of desertification and land degradation in “some 260,000 hectares all over the country to the benefit of an estimated 230,000 Namibians”.

H.E Mr. Belete Tafere, Minister of Environment Protection and Forestry of Ethiopia, stressed that land degradation and deforestation need to be given prior attention as they constitute of the very serious challenges impeding the economic development of most of the sub Saharan-African countries. In this regard, he revealed that the annual economic loss in Ethiopia due to the land degradation and deforestation is estimated at 3% of the total GDP of the country, whereas agriculture supports more than 83% of the population’s livelihood.

Mr. Michel Tankoano, Coordinator of the Partnership Programme for Sustainable Land Management Project, Burkina Faso, underlined that partnership and coordination are critical for Sustainable Land Management.

In his brief presentation, Mr. Richard Mwendandu, Director of Multilateral Environmental Agreements, Ministry of Environment and Water Resources of Kenya spoke about his country’s policies and programmes on sustainable land management and drought mitigation. He mentioned several institutional developments including the alignment of the National Action Plan to the Ten Year Strategy of the UNCCD.

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