

**Expert Group Meeting on Sustainable Land Management as Best
Practice to Enhance Rural Development**

Opening Statement

By

**Mr. Mohamed Abdulrazzak
Acting Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCWA**

Beirut, 25 March 2009

Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the United Nations House for the opening ceremony of the Expert Group Meeting on Sustainable Land Management as Best Practice to Enhance Rural Development

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Land degradation is a global problem that affects the livelihood of many categories of people, particularly the poor and those living in rural areas. Addressing the issue of land degradation is especially important in our drylands region where desertification constitutes the most extreme manifestation of such degradation.

For long it has been assumed that combating land degradation requires the adoption of specific stand-alone technologies. However, it has been increasingly recognized that combating land degradation more effectively requires instead the adoption of innovative practices as part of an overarching strategy for sustainable land management. In fact, combating land degradation is not merely a matter of getting the technology right but

also the imperative of getting the ethics, incentives and policies right, for as sustainable development is a process that seeks to maximize the growth of human welfare. This view resonates even stronger in these times where the main objective of most countries is to increase their GDPs, and focusing to maximize and to improve the livelihoods of their people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While combating land degradation is being effectively carried out in parts of the world, including some countries of the region, such endeavor by no means is universal, and with the prospects of the negative impact of climate change, the situation is expected to worsen before it gets any better.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), among other internationally agreed upon goals and commitments, will not be achieved if land degradation trends continue at their present rate.

In the region, the impact of human activity and high population growth rates, income level disparity particularly between rural and urban areas, high consumption and energy use, the negative impact of globalization and migration, the high speed of urbanization, just to name a few, continue to adversely affect not only the region's fragile natural resources but also issues such as equity and equal access to a minimum standard of human well-being. **In addition, they also affect sustainable land management**

efforts due to an increased pressure on rural areas to provide more outputs such as wood for furniture, or food for feeding the growing cities thereby increasing even further the competition for land and other natural resources.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The task ahead is daunting, but the good news is that there are now a number of methods and practices that can be reliably used to achieve urban and rural development, and that sustainable land management is fast becoming a standard practice. As such, if necessary and fitting, it should be individually adopted and adapted by countries of the region and reflected in programs management, project planning and design. The Global Mechanism (GM) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) are already financing projects on mainstreaming Sustainable Land Management.

Sustainable land management has truly become important in the world and it is time for the countries of the region to get involved in this evolving process so that this critical tool would become an essential pillar for enhancing the welfare of the peoples of the region. It is my hope that your meeting will help in furthering this issue in the region and come up with concrete recommendations.

Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen

We are privileged to have you here. I am sure you will have an interesting and productive meeting. I hope that your deliberations will live up to the expectations of the Member countries.

I thank you and I wish you success in your fruitful deliberations.