



**International Scientific Conference
"The Future of Drylands"**

Tunis (Tunisia), 19 to 21 June 2006

Declaration on research priorities to promote sustainable development in drylands,

or the

"Tunis Declaration"

We, the participants of the international scientific conference on "The Future of Drylands", assembled in Tunis (Tunisia) from 19 to 21 June 2006:

Expressing our gratitude to the Government and the people of Tunisia for having hosted the conference in Tunis under the high auspices of the President of Tunisia, His Excellency Zine El Abidine Ben Ali;

Appreciating that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has taken the lead in organizing the conference in collaboration with its partner organizations including the Tunisian Ministry for Environment and Sustainable Development, the Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS), ICARDA and ICRISAT representing the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the Secretariat of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the International Council for Science (ICSU), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the Union du Maghreb Arabe (UMA), the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN-ISDR), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations University (UNU), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), and benefiting from the financial support of The Christensen Fund (TCF), the Flemish Government of Belgium, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), and the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ);

Acknowledging that the conference has been organized in the context of the 2006 International Year of Deserts and Desertification and commemorating fifty years of dryland research in the UN system;

Considering that the world's drylands is home to more than 2 billion people with rich cultures and provide habitats to unique plant and animal species that need to be preserved for present and future generations;

Being concerned however, that many drylands are subject to land degradation and desertification as a result of extended droughts, climate change and human activities that exacerbate poverty and food insecurity;

Bearing in mind that while our scientific knowledge on dryland environments and the socio-economic dimensions of dryland development have increased over the past fifty years, important knowledge gaps still remain today and that new challenges and opportunities have emerged that need to be addressed in order to promote sustainable development through a holistic approach and action plans to combat desertification;

Urge civil society, national authorities and the international community to place combating desertification and development of drylands as a major priority and to create an enabling environment for the successful implementation of the multilateral environmental agreements and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals;

Call upon governments and multilateral environmental agreements to use sound scientific knowledge to formulate and implement policies, laws, regulations and action programmes vis-à-vis environmental issues stressing integrated management of natural resources and conservation practises;

Request the scientific community to ensure its findings are made available and understandable to decision-makers and local dryland communities so that research can help shape sound policies and good governance as well as education on an interactive basis for sustainable dryland management and improved livelihoods;

Encourage public, private, national and international institutions to step up their efforts in providing funding for demand driven, integrated and application-oriented research in both the natural and social sciences for a better understanding of human-environment interrelations in the drylands;

Request both the national decision-making bodies and the scientific community to increase their efforts in implementing research for development projects in close collaboration with and for the benefit of local dryland communities, integrating modern technologies with traditional knowledge with a view to achieving sustainable development in drylands;

Identify the following themes as priority issues in our attempt at defining future paths of dryland research for sustainable development:

- Interdependence and conservation of cultural and biological diversity;
- Integrated management of water resources in the context of a looming water crisis;
- Assessing and forecasting dryland ecosystem dynamics in order to formulate adaptation strategies in the context of global change and to alleviate poverty so as to achieve the MDGs;
- Agriculture and pastoralism as opportunities for sustainable land use;
- Coping with and management of natural and man-made disasters;
- Formulating and implementing scenarios and policy options for good governance in the context of global change;
- Identifying viable dryland livelihoods and policy options for the benefit of dryland dwellers (such as ecotourism);
- Educating for sustainable development and knowledge sharing;
- Reversing environmental degradation and promoting rehabilitation;
- Costs related to *inaction* in the field of land degradation;
- Renewable energies suitable for dryland development;
- Evaluation of dryland ecosystem services and their trade-offs;

Invite the scientific community to increase the involvement of youth and women in research, innovation and education programmes so as to facilitate gender equity;

Invite the organizers of the conference, as well as all participating institutions and individuals, to make special efforts for the wide dissemination of this Declaration through appropriate channels, such as national and international fora, publications and Internet.