

Subject: Canada's re-joining of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

As representatives of Canadian environmental, faith, and international development organizations, we are writing to call on your government to re-join the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) on the occasion of the World Day to Combat Desertification on June 17, 2016.

Canada is currently the only country in the world that is not party to this important convention, despite having played an important leadership role within the convention in the past, for example, by hosting its fifth Conference of the Parties in 2001 and often providing an important bridging role between developed and developing countries. Re-joining the convention would allow Canada to once again take a seat at the table and make sure that the UNCCD and its institutions promote, protect and respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, migrants, children, and people in vulnerable situations, as well as promoting gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity. By re-joining the convention, the Canadian government would renew its leadership and further demonstrate its commitment to re-engaging Canada as an important partner in the international community and global governance.

As you know, the Parliament of Canada ratified this convention in 1995, but on March 28, 2013, Canada's previous government unilaterally withdrew from the convention by notification from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, based on a cabinet decision alone. Hence, the reverse process, an official notification from the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the United Nations Secretary General, the depository of the convention, would suffice to re-join the convention.

Canada could not find a better moment to rejoin the Convention, since many of the objectives of the convention are directly linked to efforts under way under other international processes which Canada is a vital part of.

The availability of healthy, biodiverse and productive land and ecosystems is a prerequisite for food security, sustainable livelihoods, and economic development for the communities who live in and depend on deserts and regions vulnerable to desertification. Recently, all countries have expressed their international engagement to combat desertification and land degradation and to mitigate the effects of drought in the context of the new agenda on sustainable development, in particular the commitment for achieving a land-degradation-neutral world by 2030 (SDG 15, target 15.3).

Fighting land degradation and desertification will also help address issues of climate change. The recently-adopted Paris Agreement recognizes "safeguarding food security" as a priority in adapting to climate change, for example when increasing temperatures result in exacerbating drought. Further, combating desertification, and other good land management practices help capture the substantial mitigation potential of the land sector and can also help to build resilience to climate impacts, by providing protection against droughts, flooding, landslides and erosion. The Paris Agreement acknowledges this when it highlights the importance of conserving and enhancing carbon sinks, which in turn, implies the whole range of activities to combat desertification.

Importantly, the work of this convention not only focuses on developing countries. In its submission to the UNCCD from 2006, Canada identified large areas of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba as well as in the interior of British Columbia (accounting for 60% of Canada's crop land and 80% of its rangeland) as regions affected by drought and vulnerable to desertification. Per the projections of the IPCC, these droughts are predicted to increase in frequency and severity as a result of climate change, increasing Canada's economic and social vulnerability to these events.

The time is right for Canada to re-join the UN Convention to Combat Desertification. June 17 is the World Day to Combat Desertification. This year, the World Day will see advocacy for cooperation to restore and rehabilitate degraded land and contribute towards achieving the overall Sustainable Development Goals. Events will be organized around the globe and statements will be issued by the United Nations Secretary General and by governments around the world to celebrate the day. Media attention will be high, including op-eds, for example by officials of the convention, in major international newspapers marking the day. This would be the perfect moment for Canada to announce its renewed commitment to combatting desertification.

Signed,

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