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STATEMENT

BY

**H.E. MR. NEVILLE GERTZE
AMBASSADOR & PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE HIGH LEVEL
EVENT ON DESERTIFICATION, LAND
DEGRADATION AND DROUGHT IN LIGHT OF
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 15**

**NEW YORK
1 MAY 2017**

**Your Excellency, Mr. Peter Thomson, President of the 71st Session
of the United Nations General Assembly,
Your Excellencies,
UNCCD Secretariat Representative,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

1. At the outset, I wish to take this opportunity to thank you, Your Excellency, Mr. Peter Thomson, President of the 71st Session of the General Assembly, on behalf of the Group of Friends (GoF) on Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought (DLDD), for taking time from your busy schedule to join us today to build political momentum on desertification, land degradation and drought. This is especially significant in light of the review next year of SDG15 on achieving land degradation neutrality.
2. I salute my colleagues Ambassador Al-Thani of Qatar and Ambassador Gunnarsson of Iceland who are here on the podium, and who represent countries in which desertification also presents a challenge. We are also honoured to welcome the Deputy Executive Secretary of United Nations convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Mr. Pradeep Monga who will be moderating the panel discussion, as well as distinguished delegation from the UN Forum on Forests, Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Humanitarian Affairs, UNCCD, and the African Women's Network for community Management of Forests (REFACOF).
3. Namibia is proud to be part of the Group of Friends which has contributed to a growing awareness around land degradation neutrality in the context of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. We want to thank the UNCCD Executive Secretary for helping member states see the importance of committing to the Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Project. To date, 107 countries have committed to the Project. We also look forward to the establishment of the Land Degradation Neutrality Fund by July this year.

4. This particular SDG target is fundamental to ensuring that no one is left behind. Indeed, this is not a mere slogan but a matter of life and death for many people who have been affected by land degradation. Land degradation has many causes, and results in reduced productive potential of the land. Its consequence is increased poverty, desertification, famine, drought and migration, to mention just a few. In order to ensure that everybody benefits from the SDGs, we must focus on those populations living under the scourges of desertification, land degradation and drought.

**Mr. President,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

5. Namibia has just come out of its worse drought in 30 years. This experience has impacted on us economically, but has also negatively affected some of our development achievements. The cycle in Namibia of drought followed by floods has caused us to be proactive in developing and implementing a national Drought Policy. In so doing we have moved from a reactive to a proactive approach. Indeed, we would like to encourage countries to adopt a paradigm shift from policies based upon a reactive, crisis-management approach, to one that is focused on a proactive, risk-based approach that creates greater resilience to future episodes of drought. This is an important aspect of land degradation prevention.
6. In this respect, Namibia, which has the oldest desert on the planet and is one of the driest countries, has taken the implementation of the Namib Declaration very seriously. The adoption of the Namib Declaration at the 11th Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD held in Namibia in 2013 was significant for our country. This is why Namibia, in partnership with the Africa Union, UNCCD and other partners, convened the first ever African Drought Conference in August in Windhoek last year and adopted the Windhoek Declaration for Enhancing Resilience to Drought in Africa together with a Strategic Framework for a Drought Resilient and Prepared Africa (DRAPA).

7. Namibia is currently revising its drought policy to align it with the DRAPA Strategic Framework and is also engaged in a pilot project to enhance its Drought Early Warning System. Namibia is further convinced of the need to develop a binding Protocol on drought management under the auspices of the UNCCD to decisively tackle the issue of drought, and would like this to be considered at the 13th Conference of the Parties to be held in China later this year.
8. Namibia's commitments to achieving Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) at home is expressed in our third National Action Programme under the UNCCD. With support from the UNCCD Secretariat and the Republic of Korea, we participated in a pilot project on Land Degradation Neutrality, which assisted us to identify targets and hot spots. I am pleased to inform you that we recently completed a LDN assessment for one of our hotspot regions and are busy undertaking the same assessment for a second hotspot region.
9. Namibia continues to pursue initiatives to combat desertification through empowering its local communities, particularly women, and in close partnership with the private sector. Our latest measure to scale up these initiatives includes exploring ways in which we can extend the flagship Great Green Wall initiative of the African Union to Namibia and Southern Africa. We will present a concept note on this issue to the AU Heads of State Summit in June this year.
10. I am very happy that Africa is assuming leadership on DLDD matters. If we are to achieve our SDGs we must address this issue which underpins much of our humanitarian crises on the continent. In addition, the empowerment of women as managers of natural resources in so many countries is crucial towards achieving a land degradation neutral world.

**Mr. President,
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11. In conclusion, I would like to stress that the question of land degradation is central to the “nexus” that enhances food and water security, as well as addressing the root causes of migration, instability and conflict. Let us reaffirm our commitment in partnership with each other, and as Party to the Convention, to do more to combat climate change and DLDD. As the General Assembly recently recognized in the resolution A/71/216, achieving land degradation neutrality can accelerate the achievement of several other SDGs.

I thank you.