

As Delivered –

**Business and Industry Major Group
Statement on Desertification
Intergovernmental Preparatory Meeting for CSD 17
26 February 2009**

Madame Chair, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am Norine Kennedy of the US Council for International Business, speaking on behalf of the Business and Industry major group.

Fighting desertification is a substantial priority linked with enhancing sustainable development through agriculture, and must be addressed through broad based, knowledge-centered approaches, addressing the strategic objectives identified by the UNCCD. Moreover, climate change is likely to accelerate land degradation and with a declining ratio of arable land to population, it is more pressing than ever to step up international cooperative action and synergy among treaties in all these areas.

RESEARCH PRIORITIES AND DISSEMINATION

Business and Industry calls for a greater prioritization of research initiatives in this area and increased efforts to provide incentives and training to farmers to limit land degradation and desertification.

Improving cultivation in arid and semi-arid climates requires research prioritization, in the development of stress-tolerant, more efficient crops, and in sustaining plant growth and production. Maize with drought tolerance is expected to perform better than 'regular' maize in moderate drought conditions by about 25-30%, which would translate to about 2 million more tons of food during drought years. Progress has also been made through conventional breeding. Researchers at the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture have developed a common bean that can withstand drought better – yielding 600 to 750 kg per ha under severe drought conditions, roughly double the yield of common beans in Latin America under the same drought conditions.

INTEGRATED SOIL MANAGEMENT

The most dramatic examples of desertification are in Africa, where declining soil fertility is linked to declining agricultural productivity. Higher levels of soil organic matter improve water retention, and fertile soils support a more vigorous crop cover which in turn helps prevent soil erosion. Business and industry supports such integrated soil management. For example, the fertilizer industry has launched a project in West Africa, in which more than 60K farmers have participated to learn soil fertility techniques.

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INCENTIVES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICES BY FARMERS

Farmers can be stewards of the land through improved access to knowledge, capacity building and training in best practices. Furthering the adoption of conservation agriculture, which has been shown to dramatically reduce erosion, protect soil moisture, and improve soil quality, can be a positive step in that direction. For example, in the Guangxi region of China, studies found that the

adoption of conservation tillage could help reduce erosion by up to 43% while helping farmers increase yields.

There should also be consideration of incentives and reward schemes for effective environmental practices, to recognize and value farmers' role in combating desertification.

Growing population and resource demand, and new challenges from climate change make it more important than ever for public and private sector partnership to carry out research, the results of which should reach farmers at the front line of fighting land degradation and desertification. Farmers must be rewarded for the services they provide and incentives created to encourage good environmental practices.

With farmer and science major groups, we have identified key principles in the "Farming First" statement, which are germane to combating desertification and land degradation. This statement is available on the document tables in the conference rooms.

Thank you for your attention.