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联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Message from Mr Koïchiro Matsuura,

Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of World Day to Combat Desertification

17 June 2009

Every year, on 17 June, we observe World Day to Combat Desertification in an effort to promote public awareness of desertification and the effects of drought. Today, the well-being and livelihoods of an estimated 100 to 200 million people are at stake as desertification threatens dryland communities. Global climate change is likely to accelerate desertification and amplify its effects, notably in dryland areas, which represent about one fourth of the terrestrial surface of our planet.

One of the most serious threats to dryland communities is the lack of water and overexploitation of dryland resources. The theme for this year's World Day to Combat Desertification is, therefore, well chosen: "Conserving land and water = Securing our common future". UNESCO, with its research work in the natural sciences and its outreach through education, is increasing its efforts in combating desertification.

Our global research project "Sustainable Management of Marginal Drylands" (SUMAMAD) pools the expertise of dryland scientists and environmental experts from Belgium, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, China, Egypt, India, Iran, Jordan, Pakistan, Tunisia, Syria and Uzbekistan to promote the conservation of soil and water resources in drylands. The second phase of this UNESCO project, spanning 2009-2013, will also develop climate change scenarios so that policy-makers and dryland communities are better able to respond and adapt to the challenges posed by climate change and desertification.

However, providing solutions to combating desertification is not only a task for scientists. Efforts must also be stepped up to educate children and students on the

role they can play in helping to fight dryland degradation. Following the success of the earlier UNESCO-UNCCD Kit on Combating Desertification for primary schools – launched in 2001 and now available in 10 languages as well as in inter-active versions on the Internet in English, French and Spanish – I am pleased to announce the publication of a “Teaching Resource Kit for Dryland Countries”, available in Arabic, English, French and Spanish. Targeting teachers of secondary schools and their pupils, this new kit offers a creative approach to environmental education by stimulating pupils’ curiosity and appealing to their artistic sensibilities to better transmit scientific and environmental knowledge. The kit is one of UNESCO’s contributions to the United Nations Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2015), for which UNESCO is the lead agency within the UN system.

These are just a few examples of what can be done to promote public awareness of desertification. On this World Day, I therefore call on all concerned to continue their efforts to inform all stakeholders – including national decision-makers, as well as affected communities – about the dangers and effects of desertification.

Koïchiro Matsuura