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## **Press Conference**

### **Moving to a Land degradation neutral world**

- When:** Monday, 26 March, 10:00 (NY time)
- Who:** UNCCD Executive Secretary Mr. Luc Gnacadja  
Miss Universe and UNCCD Drylands Ambassador Ms Leila Lopes
- Where:** Dag Hammarskjold Library, Press Conference

### **Background**

Every year, 12 million hectares of land with the potential to produce 20 million tons of grain is lost through desertification and drought alone. This is land that would have at the same time provided livelihoods and support for millions of inhabitants of the drylands. This destruction of the Earth's infrastructure – land -- is taking place despite the fact that land is crucial in addressing multiple global challenges, from food security, to climate change, environmental migration, to conflicts. It is therefore timely that the upcoming Rio+20 Conference will take up the issue of land degradation and the majority of member states are calling for a land degradation neutral world.

Luc Gnacadja, Executive Secretary, UN Convention to Combat Desertification, and Leila Lopes, Miss Universe 2011, will discuss the need for setting this ambitious and attainable target to curb land degradation. They will discuss the proposed approach, and the multiple benefits such an approach to land degradation would yield including by reducing poverty, increasing food production, enhancing fresh water availability and mitigating climate change.

Mr Gnacadja is Executive Secretary of the UNCCD since 2007. Born in Benin and an architect by profession, he has a passion for fighting land degradation. Prior to joining the UNCCD, he served as Minister of Environment, Housing and Urban Development of Benin from 1999 to 2005. In March 2003 he received the 2002 Green Award of the World Bank.

Miss Universe 2011 Leila Lopes was nominated as UNCCD Drylands Ambassador in January 2012. Building on her passion for the improvement of the health of women and children in her home country of Angola, she is taken up the cause of protecting soil productivity globally, and in Africa in particular, as a platform to fight the food

insecurity and poverty of women and children. Lopes, who was crowned last September, is only the fourth woman from Africa to win the Miss Universe title.

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/webcast/index.html>

**For more information and interviews contact:**

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**ABOUT THE UNCCD**

Desertification, along with climate change and the loss of biodiversity were identified as the greatest challenges to sustainable development during the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. Established in 1994, UNCCD is the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment, development and the promotion of healthy soils. The Convention's 194 signatory Parties work to alleviate poverty in the drylands, maintain and restore the land's productivity, and mitigate the effects of drought.

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