

Statement by Dr. José L. Rubio at the Global Interactive Dialogue on land degradation/desertification and their impact on migration and conflicts.
Third Session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC3). Bonn, Germany 10 May 2005.

Mr. Chairman
Distinguished delegates.

The Mediterranean basin, with its two shores, constitutes an area particularly prone to desertification processes.

On the one hand, in the North basin, the risk of desertification is probably the most important environmental problem due to its effects on stability, the functioning of terrestrial ecosystems, the quality of the landscape, the loss of biodiversity and given the important economical consequences.

On the other hand, in the South of the Mediterranean, the situation could be considered as critical since it affects issues such as food security and the natural systems of food provision. In several cases, the situation leads to poverty and famine and it contributes to human migration to Europe.

It is estimated that out of 380 million inhabitants of the European Union, approximately 8 million come from non European Mediterranean countries.

The level of these migratory movements has been rising spectacularly in the last few decades, and it is expected that this tendency will continue to increase in the near future.

If we consider Spain as a representative country of this situation, allow me to inform you that last week they finalised a process aiming to regularize the situation of the migratory population, reaching around 800.000 people. However, it is estimated that there are around 1 million people in an irregular situation.

In this regard, one of the reasons for these migratory movements is the important economical difference per capita between both Mediterranean shores, which represents a proportion of 1 to 15, constituting the biggest economical gap between border areas in the world.

Even considering the fundamental human right to emigrate, the increasing rate of migrations is worrying due to its consequences.

We sincerely think that the effects of these movements when they are not excessive could be positive for several reasons: economic, genetical health and cultural aspects. However, an excessive irregular migration could represent negatives effects that force the adoption of solidarity measures and policies, which have not yet been implemented.

As the Moderator pointed out, the meetings held in Almeria (1994) and Valencia (2003), both in Spain, were a call for attention and initiated the debate and analysis of the migration and its relation to environmental degradation and security, including the formulation of concrete proposals.

However, there is still a long and hard way ahead of us due to the complexity and dimension of the problem and the enormous difficulties we face in order to reduce forced migration.

Nowadays, it is estimated that the developed countries spent 30 thousand millions USD per year to stop irregular emigration. Unfortunately, the reality indicates that these policies and financial resources are not enough.

As a matter of fact, in the Mediterranean basin for example, the mass media constantly show us real human dramas, hundreds of dead and thousands of missing people who were trying desperately and legitimately to improve their life.

The current situation and the immediate perspectives obligate us to an in-depth reflection and to a greater and better cooperation and collaboration among all the stakeholders.

In this context, I would like to congratulate the UNCCD Secretariat for its initiative and opportunity to organize this Interactive Dialogue within the framework of the CRIC, that I consider could contribute to raising awareness on the issue and to develop concrete mitigation strategies.

To conclude, I would like to insist on the necessity to evaluate and to acquire a deeper knowledge on the consequences of desertification, particularly in relation to the production of goods and services and regarding the possible consequences of social and economic conflicts.

Also it is necessary to promote cooperation activities in the framework of the Convention to Combat Desertification and particularly within the Regional Implementation Annexes, in this case Annexes I and IV.

I deem it also important to promote the multidisciplinary research, especially in the interactions with the functioning of the natural systems in the dry areas and the socio-economic aspects.

Finally, it would be very important to request of the European Union, urgent, innovative and concrete actions in order to face the problem.

Thank you very much.

Dr. José L. Rubio
President, European Society for Soil Conservation
Centro de Investigaciones sobre Desertificación-CIDE
Valencia, España.