

**Message of Luc Gnacadja  
Executive Secretary  
United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification**

**World Migratory Bird Day  
11-12 May 2013**

***“Networking for migratory birds”***

Migratory birds play a critical role in the world ecosystems. They disperse seeds, pollinate plants, provide fertilizers and act as important indicators of environmental changes.

On their long annual journeys, sometimes covering over 10.000 km, migratory birds need well-connected networks of habitats, where they can stopover to feed, rest and breed.

Yet, many habitats are under threat from human activities, such as deforestation, land degradation and unsustainable agriculture that reduce and fragment habitat ranges for migrating birds.

In the dryland ecosystems, where water resources are already scarce, the trend is especially worrying. Large numbers of habitats have already been damaged, or lost entirely there.

During the last year’s UN Conference for Sustainable Development (Rio+20), world leaders recognized the urgent need to reverse land degradation and committed to “strive to achieve a land-degradation neutral world in the context of sustainable development.”

This means land degradation should be avoided and already degraded land restored. Possibilities for land restoration are already there - more than two billion hectares of land worldwide can be rehabilitated through forest and landscape restoration.

Land restoration and ecosystem conservation will help to not only protect migratory birds, but also improve livelihoods, restore biodiversity and make communities resilient to climate variability.

To achieve a land-degradation neutral world, we need to make sure that governments, international organizations and civil society join their efforts. The theme for this year celebrations of the World Migratory Bird Day *“Networking for migratory birds”* highlights the need for such a collective support.

Let us ensure that migratory birds can return from their flights each year for the benefit of present and future generations. For this, achieving a land-degradation neutral world would certainly be one of the most effective means.