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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL  
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agenda\*\*  
COUNTRIES STRICKEN BY  
DESERTIFICATION AND DROUGHT

Countries stricken by desertification and drought

Preliminary report of the Secretary-General

1. The present report is submitted in accordance with paragraph 13 of General Assembly resolution 39/208 of 17 December 1984 on countries stricken by desertification and drought, by which the Secretary-General was requested to take all necessary steps to ensure the implementation of various activities concerning countries stricken by desertification and drought and to report to the General Assembly, at its fortieth session, through the Economic and Social Council, on the evolution of the situation in those countries, and to formulate proposals for specific, co-ordinated action.
2. The subject of countries stricken by desertification and drought was introduced as an additional item in the agenda of the thirty-ninth session of the General Assembly on the proposal of the Government of Senegal, acting on behalf of the Ministerial Conference on Desertification, which was held at Dakar from 18 to 27 July 1984 (see A/39/242 and Add.1).
3. At the thirty-ninth session, General Assembly resolution 39/208 was adopted following an extensive debate on countries stricken by desertification and drought, particularly those in Africa. In the resolution, the General Assembly requested the appropriate organs and organizations of the United Nations system to provide

\* A/40/50/Rev.1.

\*\* E/1985/100.

the Secretary-General with all relevant studies carried out in their respective spheres of competence; requested the Secretary-General to ensure that in the activities of the organs and organizations of the United Nations system, emphasis should be placed on scientific knowledge of the causes and effects of the phenomena of desertification and drought; and also requested the Secretary-General to place greater emphasis on the situation and prospects of those countries in the World Economic Survey.

4. In view of the complexity of the issue and a number of related developments, especially in Africa, limitations of time and the insufficient information received on the activities of the organizations of the United Nations system, the Secretary-General has prepared a preliminary report on countries stricken by desertification and drought. If the General Assembly so requests, a fuller report can be submitted to the Assembly at its forty-first session, through the Economic and Social Council, after more data had been compiled and additional consultations held.

5. The Secretary-General also draws the attention of the General Assembly to the report of the Secretary-General on the critical economic situation in Africa (A/40/372-E/1985/104 and Add.1 and 2), the report presented to the Conference on the Emergency Situation in Africa (SG/CONF.2/1 and Corr.1), the previous annual reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the medium-term and long-term recovery and rehabilitation programme in the Sudano-Sahelian region and the previous annual report of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) on the implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification. These reports help to give a fuller picture of the evolution of the present situation in countries stricken by desertification and drought in Africa and describe the various developments in these countries, including activities and institutional arrangements developed by the organizations of the United Nations system to assist them.

6. The present report is primarily a summary of the expert considerations on the subject of desertification and drought and provides a categorization of countries stricken by desertification and drought. The report must be considered tentative and subject to modification as more meteorological data, especially rainfall records, are compiled to establish patterns and trends in apparently drought affected countries and regions. The classification is also subject to refining in the light of work currently being carried out on the mapping of areas subject to desertification. Once finalized, the classification would form a base for consultations with the appropriate organs and organizations of the United Nations system regarding proposals for specific, co-ordinated action as requested in paragraph 13 of resolution 39/208.

7. It should also be emphasized that the classification contained in the report is based on a literal interpretation of the term "countries stricken by desertification and drought". The classification does not take into account that in certain countries only a small part of the territory and the population is affected. Neither does it take into account that the concept of desertification

could be narrowed so as to cover only those countries, the major areas of which are arid, semi-arid or sub-humid, and the economies of which are adversely affected to a large degree by drought and desertification. The General Assembly may wish to include these factors in its consideration of further action to be taken under the item.

8. A provisional list of countries stricken by desertification and drought is contained in table 1. In principle, the list includes the following: in the case of drought, all countries that have experienced the phenomenon to a severe degree for an extended period (at least two years) during the past five years; in the case of desertification, which is a long-term process, all countries currently affected. The list proposed is merely provisional and is therefore subject to correction and refinement. It has been compiled on the basis of:

(a) The Desertification Map of the World (A/CONF.74/2), which was accepted by the United Nations Conference on Desertification as a first approximation to indicate the global magnitude of the problem;

(b) Recent available records of drought, especially in Africa.

9. It would also be useful to recall the definitions of desertification and drought. The definition of desertification given in the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification, as adopted by the Conference and approved by the General Assembly, is as follows:

Desertification is the diminution or destruction of the biological potential of the land, and can lead ultimately to desert-like conditions (A/CONF.74/36, para. 7).

The operating definitions of drought applied are those of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO): drought resulting from an extended period of below-average precipitation, and agricultural drought, which has as its consequence severe adverse effects on agriculture.

10. According to the preliminary estimates made in table 1, a total of 74 countries would fall under the category of countries stricken by desertification and drought, as defined above. This is the result of a literal interpretation covering all countries that have a substantial portion of their territories affected by desertification and drought.

11. There is a close relationship between drought and desertification, although the two are distinct. Desertification, as defined by the Conference, is a process of degradation of fragile ecosystems found in arid, semi-arid and sub-humid lands. Desertification is man-made, the result of misuse or overuse of the land by human beings and, in pastoral economies, by their livestock. In these fragile ecosystems the delicate balance of nature can easily be upset. The resulting ecological disequilibrium is accompanied by environmental degradation in the form of desertification, as manifested in deforestation, rangeland deterioration, drylands degradation, soil erosion and, in the most severe cases, moving sands.

Table 1. Countries stricken by drought and desertification

Region	Country	Country	Country	
Africa south of the Sahara	Angola	Guinea <u>a/</u> <u>b/</u>	Nigeria	
	Benin <u>a/</u>	Guinea-Bissau <u>a/</u> <u>b/</u>	Rwanda	
	Botswana <u>a/</u>	Ivory Coast <u>b/</u>	Senegal	
	Burkina Faso <u>a/</u>	Kenya	Somalia <u>a/</u>	
	Burundi <u>a/</u>	Lesotho <u>a/</u>	Sudan <u>a/</u>	
	Cameroon	Liberia	Swaziland <u>a/</u>	
	Cape Verde <u>a/</u>	Madagascar	Togo <u>a/</u>	
	Chad <u>a/</u>	Malawi <u>a/</u>	Uganda <u>a/</u>	
	Djibouti <u>a/</u>	Mali <u>a/</u>	United Republic of Tanzania <u>a/</u>	
	Ethiopia <u>a/</u>	Mauritania	Zambia	
	Gambia <u>a/</u>	Mozambique	Zimbabwe	
	Ghana	Niger <u>a/</u>		
	North Africa	Algeria	Morocco	
		Egypt	Tunisia	
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya				
Middle East	Bahrain	Lebanon	Syrian Arab Republic	
	Democratic Yemen	Oman	Turkey	
	Iraq	Qatar	United Arab Emirates	
	Kuwait	Saudi Arabia	Yemen <u>a/</u>	
Asia	Afghanistan <u>a/</u>	Iran (Islamic Republic of)		
	China	Mongolia		
	India	Pakistan		
Latin America	Argentina	Ecuador		
	Bolivia	Mexico		
	Brazil	Paraguay		
	Chile	Peru		
	Colombia	Venezuela		
Europe	Spain			
	Portugal			
Other developed countries	Australia			
	Israel			
	United States of America			
	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics			
Others	Namibia			
	South Africa			

Note: Antarctica and parts of Canada are considered "cold" deserts and are excluded from the classification of countries subject to desertification.

a/ Least developed countries.

b/ Stricken by drought but not currently affected by desertification.

12. Only warm ecosystems have been included, following the criteria used at the Conference, which excluded cold desert regions, such as Antarctica and parts of Canada. One characteristic of arid climates is not only low rainfall but also variable rainfall. The coefficient of variation in the Sahelian zone, for example, is 30 to 50 per cent, compared to 15 per cent or less in the wet Guinean zone and the tropical rainforests of central Africa. Because arid lands are subject to frequent droughts, there is a tendency for desertification to accelerate in the absence of means to cope with the droughts.

13. It is also important to note in assessing the evolution of the current situation that the present African drought, the manifestations of which were discerned most acutely between 1968 and 1973, has in fact persisted with certain variations for the past 17 years. It has been characterized by short-lived respites or by intensifications with disastrous consequences. The drought has even extended to normally forested regions of Africa, attaining proportions that some climatologists have called a continental drought.

14. Despite the length of the drought, the weight of scientific opinion is that there is no evidence of a long-term change in the climate of Africa, as the United Nations Conference on Desertification and the World Climate Conference had already concluded. More recently, computerized simulations of 500-year weather patterns were prepared for the Scientific Round Table on the climatic situation and drought in Africa, which was held at Addis Ababa in February 1984, under the auspices of the Economic Commission for Africa, UNEP, the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO) and WMO. These simulations indicate that the present African drought is, although the worst in this century, within a normal range of variability. The logical, if disturbing, conclusion that must be drawn is that drought is a recurrent phenomenon that the drought-stricken countries, especially of Africa, must learn to live with.

15. The combination of drought and desertification has had far-reaching and disastrous consequences on economic and social life in the countries affected, especially in Africa. In late 1983 and early 1984, more than 150 million people were facing extreme hunger, malnutrition and in many cases shortages of potable water. Irregular or insufficient rainfall resulted in major crop and livestock losses, and by April 1985 the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) could identify 21 African countries facing critical food shortages. By that time, massive movements of people within and between countries from drought-stricken to more favourable areas had started, causing additional strains on limited resources and aggravating environmental conditions. The prolonged drought has also lowered water tables in rivers, lakes, aquifers and dams, with serious implications for countries that are developing their hydroelectrical potential to lessen dependence on oil imports. In several African countries, the lowering of the water table has had serious repercussions for productive capacities and basic social services. At present, it is estimated that about 30 million people are at risk and that drought-induced population displacements could reach well over 10 million people.

16. The 36 least developed countries, the list of which was established by the General Assembly in accordance with criteria applied by the Committee for

Development Planning, are the object of special attention by the international community. These countries, most of which are stricken by drought and desertification, are in a state of extreme deprivation. There are, however, a large number of other countries which, although not classified as least developed countries, are currently affected by drought and desertification. These countries are listed in table 2. Among the countries listed, there is of course room for selectivity, since the internal capacity of countries for combating desertification and coping with drought depends to a large extent on their natural resources and the state of their economic development. Many of the countries listed in table 2 have extensive financial resources, emanating from abundant natural resources and/or industrialized economies.

17. Since the General Assembly will be considering, at its fortieth session, the item on countries stricken by desertification and drought for the second time only, the Secretary-General would appreciate guidance and direction from the Assembly on ways and means to proceed with the implementation of programmes for drought rehabilitation and desertification control. In the meantime, the Secretary-General, in concert with the executive heads of the United Nations organizations concerned, continues to keep all aspects related to the question of drought and desertification under active review and will be prepared to present more specific recommendations on action to be taken by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly in accordance with any decisions they may take.

Table 2. Countries stricken by drought and desertification but which are not least developed countries

Region	Country	Country	Country
Africa	Angola	Liberia <u>a/</u>	Senegal
	Cameroon	Madagascar	Swaziland
	Ghana	Mauritania	Zambia
	Ivory Coast <u>a/</u>	Mozambique	Zimbabwe
	Kenya	Nigeria	
North Africa	Algeria	Morocco	
	Egypt	Tunisia	
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya		
Middle East	Bahrain	Qatar	
	Iraq	Saudi Arabia	
	Kuwait	Syrian Arab Republic	
	Lebanon	Turkey	
	Oman	United Arab Emirates	
Asia	China	Mongolia	
	India	Pakistan	
	Iran (Islamic Republic of)		
Latin America	Argentina	Ecuador	
	Bolivia	Mexico	
	Brazil	Paraguay	
	Chile	Peru	
	Colombia	Venezuela	
Europe	Spain		
	Portugal		
Other developed countries	Australia		
	Israel		
	United States of America		
	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics		
Others	Namibia		
	South Africa		

Note: Antarctica and parts of Canada are considered "cold" deserts and are excluded from the classification of countries subject to desertification.

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