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General Assembly
66th Session

**High-level Meeting of the GA on
addressing desertification,
land degradation and drought
in the context of sustainable
development and poverty eradication**

Swiss Statement

presented by
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President of the Swiss Confederation

Permanent Mission of Switzerland
to the United Nations

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Mr. President,

At the turn of the 16th century, Leonardo da Vinci said that we know more about the stars than we do about the earth beneath our feet. The great Italian thinker was right back then, and he would still be right today. The earth, the soil, the humus, are wholly unspectacular. And yet they deserve our attention because they are intimately tied up with the great challenges of our time, with the battle against poverty and development issues, in a word: with the long-term survival of our planet.

Last month, I visited the Horn of Africa where I was able to see for myself the devastating effects of drought and the consequences of desertification on populations severely affected by famine. This situation is the result of a combination of various factors. Allow me to highlight just two:

Firstly, environmental protection has a direct impact on food security and the alleviation of poverty. Lasting improvements in living conditions and poverty reduction are possible only if we preserve the environment by using natural resources in a sustainable manner.

My country realizes that the costs of inaction are much higher than those of concerted, effective prevention, and is therefore actively committed to the sustainable use of natural resources and to the equitable and fair sharing of the resulting benefits. Switzerland actively contributes to implementing the Convention to Combat Desertification and specific projects and programmes, such as developing human and institutional resources geared to the needs of the affected populations. Switzerland's efforts are focused on the poorest and take a long-term view.

Mr. President,

The second aspect is the need to attach greater importance to the links between the three major environmental challenges of climate change, desertification and biodiversity. Rather than tackling the various problem areas in isolation in different conventions, we need to take a holistic view. To this end, Switzerland actively supports the strengthening of synergies between the relevant international instruments. We should think about land when we talk about climate, and about biodiversity when we talk about soil degradation. Unfortunately, of these three problem areas, soils are often disregarded in discussions on sustainability, despite the vital functions they perform that are essential to life and the survival of our planet.

I would like to express the hope that this day will go some way towards raising the profile of soil conservation in our political agendas. This terra incognita under our feet certainly deserves as much.

Thank you for your attention.