

## **'Forest restoration: a path to recovery and well-being'**

Statement by Ms. Tina Birmpili  
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Opening statement

Your Excellency Madame Chair,  
Your Excellencies, distinguished delegates,  
Colleagues,

Greetings from the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

It is an honour to address all of you at the UN Forum on Forests.

Today, as we seek to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and avoid repeats, we must remember how important the health of forests is to the health of humanity.

Forests contribute to human and planetary health far beyond their confines.

They absorb carbon dioxide. They stabilize rainfall patterns, lower temperatures, and protect against desertification, sand and dust storms and drought.

They sustain local livelihoods, more than 1.6 billion people – a crucial safety net for local populations. They provide essential natural resources such as food, water, natural medicine and building materials.

They can also buffer and slow the spread of zoonotic diseases. And they have an immediate restorative power. Peace, clean air, visual splendour, no matter the season.

Between 2015 and 2020, the rate of deforestation was estimated at 10 million hectares per year. The rate of loss has been in decline, but the slower pace is not a victory.

Renewed and healthy forests can, and must be, part of the solution to the many crises our planet faces: climate change, land degradation and biodiversity loss among them.

Now, in this time of great upheaval, we have the chance to return our forests to life. By strengthening commitments to forest restoration in updated pledges under the Paris Agreement. By meeting land restoration and Land Degradation Neutrality commitments – both under the UNCCD and independently – during the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. By increasing ambition on protected areas when the world agrees a new biodiversity framework later this year.

An important opportunity lies in pandemic recovery spending. We all want our economies to recover from the pandemic.

Forest restoration and sustainable forest management can help us do this. To give just one example, studies estimate that each US dollar invested in restoring degraded forests yields between USD 7 and USD 30 in economic benefits.

From the UNCCD, we would like to share three messages:

1. Bringing land into balance is the key to bringing food, water, energy, and nature into balance.
2. Investing in land restoration in the post-pandemic era is a simple, inexpensive solution, a solution accessible to all, a solution that will benefit small-scale farmers – including women farmers, who are responsible for most of the food production in developing countries.
3. Since the discussion today will also touch upon the role of the private sector in investing in restoration, the Great Green Wall is an example of a mosaic of different options and entry points that the private sector has in working with governments and other stakeholders, from planting trees to sustainable farming, to greening the cold chains for food and vaccines, to jobs generation and electricity access to all either off or on the grid.

By investing in our forests, we are investing in greener and brighter post-pandemic future. Meaningful jobs. More secure livelihoods. Broader rural prosperity. Improved public health. Disaster risk reduction. Food and water security. Healthy biodiversity and ecosystem services. Climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Investing in our forests is investing in our own health and in the planet's long-term prosperity.

Thank you very much