

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **THE PROBLEM OF DESERTIFICATION PRESENTED AT THE PALAIS DES NATIONS**

By its resolution 58/211 of 23 December 2003, the General Assembly of the United Nations declared 2006 the International Year of Deserts and Desertification.

The phenomenon of desertification already concerns 100 countries with approximately 2 billion inhabitants and is growing so fast that it is starting to endanger the survival of more than 135 million people living in the regions that border the deserts.

Desertification takes different forms in various parts of the world and all attempts to stop it must be carefully studied, bearing in mind the characteristics of the environment, the traditions and the socio-economic needs of local populations.

Within the framework of the international cooperation programmes promoted by the Italian government, the Ministry of Environment and Territorial Protection, in agreement with the University of Tuscia (Viterbo, Italy) has started several projects in various regions of the world in order to study new ways of fighting desertification. Modern surveying technologies are made available to local populations in order to raise their awareness of the ecological aspects of the problem.

The exhibition “Combating desertification: science, technologies and daily life”, organized by the Department of Forest Ecology of the University of Tuscia under the aegis of the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations will take place in the cyberspace of the Library of the United Nations Office at Geneva from 12 June 2006 to the end of the year.

The exhibition provides the opportunity to compare different situations where scientific research can effectively contribute to the solution of the problems that push populations to abandon territories subject to desertification.

The first part of the exhibition is devoted to the sand storms that plague Northern China. The “WinDust Project” of the University of Tuscia has a twofold goal: on the one hand, to deepen the knowledge of the fragile desert ecosystem by detecting the areas that are characterized by high dust emission, on the other, to propose development models with a low environmental impact that can help local communities protect their surroundings.

Repeated dust measuring (or measurement) campaigns, carried out during the sand storm season, are making it possible to draw up a map of the most sensitive areas, which will constitute the basis for systematic action. Another important step will be the establishment of a laboratory technique to facilitate the propagation of the *Haloxylon*

*ammodendron* (a local species also known as “Sousou”) that may play a key role in the recuperation of the soil of the Alashan Plateau in Inner Mongolia (China).

The second part of the exhibition is devoted to the Sahara. The projects of the University of Tuscia in Algeria cover many different aspects. In the oasis of Ghardaia, they focus on the preservation of local traditions by creating a “Museum of the Deserts”. In Tinerkouk, they aim at establishing a scientific method to protect the palms from the so called Bayoud disease and at fixing the desert dunes. In other parts of the Sahara, their goal is the treatment of sewage water for irrigation purposes.

The third and final part of the exhibition is devoted to research methodology to determine the areas in the Mediterranean Region that are most exposed to the risk of desertification. The project, in cooperation with the local authorities of Sardinia in Italy, aims at building a complex model that will be able to predict where desertification will happen using satellite data relating to climate, soil structure and land use. A sophisticated analysis of the data will serve as the basis for *ad hoc* action.