endure daily hardship and an uncertain future. We must face up to the fact that the sometimes irreversible degradation of cultural, natural and agricultural heritage, of fragile ecosystems innovative, the rapid spread of deserts, as well as inadequate international response and local efforts to combat desertification, aggravate conditions of poverty across the world, deepening the crisis on a global scale.

In 2005 in Johannesburg, under the slogan ‘Green Cities: Plant for the Planet’, we were invited to adopt accords for the creation of a network of cities striving for a sustainable Urban Environment. This year, we call for the adoption of a World Charter on Deserts and to Combat Desertification to mark World Environment Day and the closing of the International Year of Deserts and Desertification. In this way, we hope to contribute to achieving some of the Millennium Development Goals, goals which were reinforced and renewed by the decisions made by Heads of State and Government during the World Summit held in New York in September 2005. All our efforts aim to sustainably reinforce our common efforts towards the development of human rights, a healthy environment, a decent and fulfilled life and a global, real, and sustainable development, for all. It is therefore our duty to unite and consolidate our efforts and means and to make them work for our common conviction, that of a common future, for the generations of today and tomorrow and for their legitimate right to live on a protected and safe planet. Let this World Environment Day be an opportunity for us all to be messengers of world peace and harmony, messengers of hope for the future – that of our children and that of our planet.”

H.E. Abdelaziz Bouteflika is President of the Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria.

Cherif Rahmani: Don’t Desert Drylands

This slogan, in the form of an urgent call to action, defines the context in which World Environment Day 2006 will be celebrated. Algeria, my country, is honoured to have been chosen by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) as host of this day. Algeria is doubly honoured, first and foremost because the majority of its territory comprises desert and also because, by choosing Algeria, it is the whole of Africa that is honoured.

This year, the theme builds on Resolution 58/211 under which the General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed 2006 International Year of Deserts and Desertification. This decision represents a welcome outcome of the multipled steps taken by my country on deserts, initiated and developed for many years, but that has certainly experienced a revival since the year 2000.

Many efforts, many initiatives and many plans of action have thus been successful. Algeria has committed itself, resolutely and consistently, to an approach that not only must be but unifies as well. Under the innovative environmental policies initiated by His Excellency, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, President of the Republic, we have developed and conclusively and visibly expanded on the commitments made during the Summits on the Environment and Sustainable Development of Rio then Johannesburg, as well as the UN’s Summit on the Millennium Development Goals. We have also tried, and often succeeded, at our level, to encourage partnerships and mediums of cooperation and dialogue at a regional and international level, while always ensuring that our approach respected common principles, such as those pertaining to “shared but differentiated responsibility”. Should one not therefore consider, that by choosing Algeria as the focal point for the celebrations in 2006, the aspirations and very valid expectations awakened by the UN Resolution declaring this the International Year of Deserts and Desertification to have been consecrated?

It is in any case justifiable that we once again declare ourselves honoured by this selection, in as much as the Resolution was adopted following the initiative taken by my country and that of the Fondation Deserts du Monde created under the patronage of H.E. Abdelaziz Bouteflika. I have the pleasure and the privilege to reaffirm here, in my capacity of Ambassador, Honorary Spokesperson of the UN for the 2006 conference, how seriously we take the demands of the mission we have been given.

We must first give back hope to the millions of people in drylands. Hope alone, however, can not satisfy expectations when survival is often the prime issue. We not only feel concern at the often chronic material poverty in which entire communities are sinking in desert and semidesert regions.

Their poverty is, in our view, the supreme issue. And it is there that we draw on the reasons for our actions and our commitment. Algeria will host a high level meeting at the end of the year, in the context of the International Year on Deserts and Desertification. The meeting will take stock of all that was warmly and generously thought of and retained concerning deserts and its people. This will be the crowning achievement, not only suggested but also programmed, of a series of actions throughout the months that make up this symbolic year. The fight against desertification is an unending one. The fight against poverty is an imperative one, which now categorically forces itself upon us.

So what territory in reality is touched by our action? It is obviously the planet as a whole. For, if deserts only appear here and there, in man’s view, the heart of human sensitivity, on the other hand, resides everywhere.

We must speak everywhere in favour of the deserts and the populations that inhabit them and that have formed such extraordinary civilizations, such extraordinary cultures!

We must sensitize man everywhere because where man’s heart and spirit are conquered, they put themselves at the service of the causes that have moved them positively.

Let us always remember that we are at the service of one slogan: Don’t desert drylands! Because that slogan puts us at the service of those who, though possibly unaware of our efforts, nonetheless and paradoxically, expect much from us.

H.E. Cherif Rahmani is Minister of Environment of Algeria. He is also President of the Foundation ‘Deserts du Monde’ and Honorary Spokesperson of the UN International Year of Deserts and Desertification.

Our Planet