

I. Evaluating the Environmental Crisis Response throughout the UN System

Between 1980 and 2007, the Islamic Republic of Mauritania experienced repeated flood disasters that left their mark on its people and economy. This mark has not been simply the effects of nature, but also the lack of funding to create the infrastructure for responding to the crisis. These concomitant issues have compounded the crisis effects that Mauritania has suffered. In January 2002, three regions in southern Mauritania were devastated by a cold wave and subsequent heavy rains. This environmental crisis triggered the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to assess that, “The crisis revealed a lack of capacity at the national level to respond promptly and in a coordinated manner to a given emergency situation.” Severe flooding occurred again in August 2009 displacing nearly 10,000 people. On September 9 of that year, the US Ambassador declared a disaster due to the effects of the flood. US AID was quickly made available through its UNICEF partner amounting to a little over \$55,000 to help ease the immediate needs of the victims. Other humanitarian actors in-country were still waiting for an official declaration of a state of emergency by the government on September 17th before they could begin to mobilize. Most recently, in August 2010, torrential rains led to the flooding of five regions. The International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC) and Mauritanian Red Crescent (MRC) stated that the assessment of the crisis was “challenging to carry out due to the difficult accessibility and availability of transportation.”

Mauritania is committed to growing its response capabilities in partnership with the UN to better combat, and prevent environmental crisis situations. To that effort Mauritania has created an Action Plan for the Prevention and Risk Management of Disasters (PANPGRC) slated to work within the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) with the UN. The Millennium Ecosystems Evaluation enumerated several key areas, aside from flooding, with the potential to create environmental crisis situations; increased wind and water erosion due to marked decrease of tree cover, the management of fishing resources, and the development of extractive industries, namely, mining and oil. Mauritania is resolved to grow its economy through industry in a responsible manner and will continue to monitor these areas of concern with its risk management partners.

In an effort to address the short falls, Mauritania respectfully requests funding for the implementation of improved communication and chain-of-command systems to combat the issues faced in the past when dealing with environmental crisis’. One way to address these points is through the African Real Time Environmental Monitoring System (ARTEMIS). This system has a proven track record giving warning of rainfall patterns as well as locust migration- both of which have caused environmental crisis events in Mauritania in the past. Mauritania would like to propose the integration of the ARTEMIS system into the PANPGRC, and create regional directors for crisis management who will be responsible for making recommendations for declaring states of emergency to the national lead. This effectively creates a communication infrastructure to forewarn Mauritanian citizens of impending issues, as well as a means for quick response by the government so that the country can benefit from international aid in times of crisis.

II. Assessing Efforts to Promote Future Global Biodiversity

Developing nations are home to much of the world’s biodiversity. Yet it is unreasonable to expect a developing nation, like Mauritania, to put the environment ahead of basic human welfare. This often translates into an inability to make promoting future biodiversity a priority. The UN has long since recognized the connection between poverty and the environment and to address this issue it has created the Poverty and Environment Initiative (PEI), “to contribute to poverty reduction and improved well-

being of poor and vulnerable groups through mainstreaming of environment into national development processes.” Promoting biodiversity then becomes as function of sustainable development, resolving the competition between the environment and human needs in the struggle for survival.

PEI Mauritania has developed three specific objectives: inclusion of environmental sustainability in national development strategies, increasing budget allocations towards the environment, and building long-term capacity of the government to integrate environmental concerns into the design and implementation of development plans. It is difficult to track progress without data to act as a baseline, so it was with great pride Mauritania produced its first State of the Environment Report in 2008 with PEI support. This report complemented the formation of the National Environmental Action Plan (PANE) which is the acting map to Mauritania journey towards sustainable development and the promotion of biodiversity within Mauritania.

Mauritania cannot move solely to protect the biodiversity of its land-based flora and fauna. As a conscientious coastal nation it also looks to preserve the biodiversity off its coastal shores as well. Mauritania remains a proud member of the Abidjan Convention for the cooperation in the Protection and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the West and Central African Region, and dedicated to its objectives to fight against six marine-based forms of pollution, for bettered coastal environmental management, and the need for continued scientific and technological cooperation for the reinforcement of national environmental harmonization. In addition to these commitments, Mauritania is interested in focusing on the artisanal fishing industry. UNEP’s 2005 report on the need for the UN to fund programs for artisanal fishing industries outlines the need for this approach as the world faces its sustainable development challenge. This report states that, the sustainability of artisanal fishing come from both “the actions of artisanal fishers themselves,” as well as the difficulty in establishing effective monitoring and management controls over the industry itself. The recently completed Artisanal Fisheries Development Project, Phase II, shows that these objectives can be met successfully and would benefit from another similar program and funding.

III. Strengthening and Promoting Best Practices for the Reduction of the Worldwide Carbon Footprint

According to the Global Footprint Network, “The carbon Footprint is 54 percent of humanity’s overall Ecological Footprint and its most rapidly-growing component.” Global Footprint Network asserts that humanity’s carbon footprint has increased 11-fold since 1961. Reducing our carbon footprint is a critical step Mauritania must take towards living within the means of the planet.

Mauritania has maintained a fairly steady ecological footprint since 1960, hovering around 5 global hectares per capita, but the problem lies in the marked decrease in biocapacity. Massive deforestation, desertification, and accelerated wind and water erosion have all contributed to the widespread degradation of Mauritania’s environment. As Mauritania industrializes, this ratio will come to bear on its carbon footprint. Mauritania has crafted the National Action Plan to fight desertification (PAN/LCD) adopted officially in 2006, and is working on a massive reforestation project around its capitol and population center, Nouakchott. According to official statistics, the desert is encroaching on average, six to seven hectares per year. Mauritania aims to create a green belt surrounding Nouakchott by planting around 384,000 trees, to halt the encroaching desert and begin to reverse the desertification process.

Mauritania is excited to continue this "green belt" effort with a proposition for widespread planting of the Neem Tree. The Neem Tree is exceptionally adapted to the arid climate, and comes with amazing medicinal properties available for the harvesting. The government of Mauritania is excited to propose a "green band" stretching eastward from Nouakchott with a forest of Neem Trees. This will simultaneously address the worldwide carbon footprint and regional issues with desertification, and also provide a profitable harvest crop for exportation. The responsible selective-cutting of this forest will yield a new, and important export, in addition to its environmental benefits.