



# Answering Cries of Despair

**ABDELAZIZ BOUTEFLIKA** on World Environment Day calls for a charter on deserts and desertification

**A**lgeria is greatly honoured to have been chosen by the United Nations Environment Programme to host the 2006 World Environment Day celebrations. We are particularly proud to have been chosen, as this year's focus is on deserts and desertification.

The official slogan for WED 2006, 'Don't Desert Drylands', addresses sustainable development in the deserts. In order to respond to the concerns and expectations of many countries on this issue, the UN General Assembly adopted, at Algeria's instigation, Resolution 58/211, which established 2006 as the International Year of Deserts and Desertification.

## Natural disasters

Through its dual role as host country of World Environment Day and as the official 'voice' for the 2006 International Year of Deserts and Desertification, Algeria is receiving international acknowledgement for its efforts towards environmental protection and balanced and sustainable development, as well as its wide and varied activities aimed at protecting the environment. Algeria is keen to establish an international, innovative and sincere partnership, based on the principles of fairness, solidarity and common responsibility.

My country is delighted to host WED 2006 on the African continent, large sections of which are covered by deserts and drylands, making it the most affected by and most vulnerable to the devastating consequences of the alarming degradation of fertile soils. Persistent and cyclical droughts, frequent natural disasters, poverty, migration, and other dramatic aspects of underdevelopment have had numerous consequences that cannot be confined to narrow national and regional contexts and spaces because they go beyond the political and natural borders of nation states. These numerous consequences have in fact been underlined on many occasions by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan.

## Combating desertification

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) – a unique and innovative African initiative of which Algeria is one of the key instigators – is, without a doubt, a resolute and responsible response to the major challenges that the continent faces today. With a wealth of natural and human potential, often little or badly used, Africa must face the challenges of globalisation, especially those related to better governance and steady and sustainable development, the principal pillar of which is the environmental dimension. Combating desertification, conservation – and the integrated and rational development of arid, semiarid, mountainous and forest areas, preserving water resources and reducing poverty are therefore key objectives that must be quickly addressed, in order to put an end to the devastating impacts of underdevelopment on the continent.

On the occasion of World Environment Day, the international community is called upon to reflect on the possibility of forging a sustainable partnership, responsible and innovative, which should be able to contribute effectively to the success of this exemplary African initiative in Eco-Development. In so doing, it will be answering the cries of despair, the aspirations and expectations of nations and peoples who must cruelly ▶

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 and biodiversity, 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 San Francisco, 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.*

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