



## The African Union

Chair: Imaan Karachiwalla

The primary role is to help Africa in her journey of becoming a developed, prosperous and peaceful continent.

<https://au.int/en/about/vision>

### **REPORT:** Desertification in the Sahel/Central Africa

#### **Introduction**

Between 1984 and 1985, the existence of the “Hunger Belt” in Africa spread like wildfire through the media. A massive drought had affected Sahel, leaving the area completely bare of vegetation and dry of water. This was not the first or last time that Sahel had such a devastating drought. However, due to the attention it got from the media, the term changed the way society related to climate change to desertification. Today, many scientists have realized that there is a relationship between climate change and desertification and that poor resource exploitation, rainfall, and other factors come into play as well.

#### **Definitions**

*Desertification* - the process of land turning into desert as the quality of the soil declines over time. Many countries around the world suffer from the problems caused by desertification but it is the Sahel region of Africa where the effects are greatest.

*The Sahel* - narrow belt of land which lies immediately to the south of the Sahara Desert and which extends across most of Africa.

#### **General Overview**

The Sahel is the semi-arid transition region between the Sahara Desert and the humid African savannahs. It extends from the Atlantic in the west to the Indian ocean in the east. It has high variability of rainfall; it is one of the poorest and most environmentally



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degraded areas. Annual rainfall ranges from 100–200 mm in the north of the strip up to 600 mm in the south.

Although at first glance, it may seem like this is a simple issue, the issue is rather complex. Although climate change does strongly influence the Sahel, the combined effects of population growth, land degradation (a result of deforestation and soil erosion), reduced and erratic rainfall, lack of environmental policies and priorities has led to the recent dry and arid state of Sahel. However, recent studies based on satellite images show the advances in the growth of vegetation in few areas of the Sahara, bringing relief to the region.

The issue at hand requires the consideration of several factors from the agricultural plot and the basin, to farming, to village, communal, local, national or regional land and levels of decision-making (i.e. the local government to the international community). Given recent technological innovations and human ingenuity, desertification is can be solved if, and only if, scientific, political and citizen cooperation is not sustainably coordinated.

### **Major Parties Involved**

Crisis area: Sahel

Strongly involved foreign powers: Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan and Chad, African Union Kenya, Japan.

The African Union is working with the countries above via the African Initiative for Combating Desertification (AI-CD) to help combat this crisis in the Sahel by promoting sustainable measures.

The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) is currently involved in the African Union's Green Wall Project to combat desertification and help detrimental impacts such as starvation.

### **Timeline of Key Events**

1915 The first-ever recorded drought in the Sahel, causing a great migration to the more fertile Southern areas.



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1960s- Periods of abundant rainfall that filled water wells, caused the jobs of farmers and shepherds to return.

1968 to 1974- in this period of time, droughts returned with a greater force thus resulting in a lack of water and a large-scale famine. This also triggered the first mobilization of external aid as well as the creation of the International Fund for Agricultural Development by the United Nations.

1977- Due to the extent of the draughts and the widespread media coverage, in this year the United Nations held its first of many conferences on the topic of Desertification in Nairobi, Kenya.

1993- The Convention to Combat Desertification was held

2006- This year was made to be the International Year of the Desert and Desertification

1984 to 1985- This was the year that the media brought the world's attention to the existence of the "Hunger Belt" in the Sahel.

1994- The United Nations declares 14<sup>th</sup> June as the United Nations declared 17<sup>th</sup> June as the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought

1996- United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) was established

2007- The Leaders Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan, and Chad, with the support of the African Union launched the Green Wall Project -after drawing inspiration from Wangari Mathai's work- to combat desertification.

### **Past Attempts at Resolving This Issue**

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2007- Green Wall Project launched by the African Union

### Suggested Websites

- <https://desertification.wordpress.com/2015/02/16/the-sahel-desertified/>
- [https://www.wearewater.org/en/the-sahel-desertification-beyond-drought\\_318262](https://www.wearewater.org/en/the-sahel-desertification-beyond-drought_318262)
- <https://www.perc.org/2004/06/01/desertification-of-the-sahel/>
- <http://theconversation.com/the-immense-challenge-of-desertification-in-sub-saharan-africa-84439>
- <https://leadership.ng/2019/05/23/combating-desertification-in-sahel-horn-of-africa/>