



Calling for Support to designate 2021 as an **International Year of Rangelands & Pastoralists**

A growing worldwide network acknowledges that the condition and productivity of the world's rangelands and grasslands are critical to a sustainable future for people everywhere. Unhealthy and unproductive rangelands and grasslands destabilize countries, endanger national security, compromise economic productivity, and rob our youngest generation of opportunities for a prosperous future. To increase knowledge and understanding about these unique ecosystems and the people who rely on them, we urge you to join the effort to gain a United Nations resolution to designate 2021 as an ***International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists!***

Justification

Nearly half of the Earth's land surface is classified as *rangeland* and *grassland*, and the health and productivity of these lands are critical to the livelihoods of an estimated 500 million people around the world. Increasing the understanding of the importance of these lands to global food security and environmental services, and calling attention to the need for sustainable management and enlightened policies, will benefit not only those who gain economic sustenance from them today, but for future generations to come.

Pastoralists, and those who derive their livelihoods from rangelands and grasslands, play a key role in their management. As stated in the background statement for the "Transformations toward sustainable pastoralism in drylands: UNEA-2 side event", pastoralists are both livestock herders and environmental stewards of rangelands. Thus, sustainable pastoralist practices are critical to achieving food and water security as well as resilient local and national economies, and to addressing environmental concerns such as carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation, and protection of land and ecosystems.

Yet, many forces threaten the productivity and ecological integrity of these lands and the human communities that rely on them. Such threats include: unsustainable grazing practices, crop land expansion, land grabbing, land fragmentation, generational succession, migration to cities, damaging fire regimes, invasive plants, and harmful policies. Given changing climatic conditions and legal rulings, public health concerns, economic uncertainties, and controversies over land use, there is an urgent need to increase public awareness of the need to restore, maintain, manage, and make informed decisions about these landscapes. At the same time,

the scientific and policy communities must be mobilized to attack these challenges with renewed vigor and creative energy to identify practical and strategic solutions.

A Quick Look at Outreach Plans for an International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists

- Joint International Rangelands and International Grasslands Congress in 2021
- Social media campaign and video productions to raise awareness of producers, consumers, and policy makers
- Pastoralists gatherings sponsored by WISP and the Pastoralist Hub to share and document local knowledge and strategize practical solutions
- Policy resolutions presented to the UN General Assembly

Support for United Nations Goals

This “call for support” builds on the attention the United Nations has given to economic, social, and environmental issues for sustainable development. Established 15 years ago, the UN Millennium Development Goals put a focus on targets to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger and ensure environmental sustainability, among other goals. *Healthy and productive rangelands and grasslands contribute to improved livelihoods and environmental vigor.*

The UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) urges “development and implementation of national and regional policies, programmes, and measures to prevent, control and reverse land degradation and mitigate the effects of drought through scientific and technological excellence, raising public awareness..., thereby contributing to poverty reduction.” *Improved pastoral systems can reverse the destructive effects of drought and create economic opportunity for rural populations.*

The ambitious “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” substantiates and expands on these earlier frameworks with specific goals for sustainable agriculture, water management, sustainable energy and economic growth, combating climate change, and promoting sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems. *Healthy and productive rangelands and grasslands throughout the world are intrinsically linked to the successful realization of these goals.*

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