

Welcome Address

Prof. Moncef HARRABI, on behalf of the Organizing Committee

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you all to Tunisia and to this beautiful city, the gate to the desert, Douz.

As we meet today, food availability in many countries is at risk, 1 million people are facing starvation. Not only food availability is a global concern but also increased food prices that cannot be afforded by poor people or even the middle class. By 2025, the earth will have an additional 1.5 billion people putting more constraints on already scarce natural resources.

Global warming is no longer a myth but a reality and consequently climate change is a daily matter. It is changing our way of life and will bring even more profound changes, that will impact the food we eat and the standard of our lives.

The issue of energy is also a big challenge. We cannot rely on fossil energies such as petroleum. We have to consider more utilization of renewable energies in order to harmonize with our environment.

Thus, humanity faces many challenges and the scientific community will have to respond to these challenges. We have to find alternatives in order to reduce the negative impact of these changes. As scientists, we have a duty to humanity to provide solutions that will improve socio-economic status, alleviate poverty and eliminate hunger.

To devise the solution, we propose again to learn from the arid lands and desert in particular. It provides a model of a consequence of global climate change where we can study how it developed, how we can tackle over it, and where we can live with it. On the other hand, the desert, a widespread resource, offers new potential to contribute to the economies of many countries. Researchers have yet to address this vast reservoir of resources whether in water, energy, food and feed production.

For this purpose we gather in this conference to first exchange new scientific findings, debate new challenges and establish network to move ahead as a community devoted to solve complex problems with the most efficient technologies.

This conference brings together more than 150 top scientists from 20 countries, all looking forwards to seeing our old friends and making new ones. We will discuss our research approaches, consolidate our teams and share thoughts that may one day bring about changes in the vast, untapped and beautiful desert.

We look forward to a successful meeting, fruitful discussions and solid and valid recommendations that can be readily implemented to render the desert from a constraint to an asset.

We would like to thank you all for your participation in this conference and we would especially like to extend our appreciation to our co-organizers and sponsors. University 7th November at Carthage, University of Sousse, IRA Mednine, Technology Park at Borj Cedria, Borlaug Institute at Texas A&M, USA, United Nations Development Program, GTZ.

We also appreciate JAALS, the Japanese Association for Arid Land Studies and its Commission of Desert Engineering of JAALS for giving many helpful suggestions on organization of the conference.

Our special thanks go to the international scientific committee, who reviewed the articles.

We are very grateful to the local organizing committee who worked relentlessly in order for the participants to have all the facilities and the appropriate environment for a successful meeting.

The proceedings of the conference will be published as a special issue of Journal of Arid Land Studies. We thank JAALS again providing us an opportunity to publish it.