

## 2014 Cook Prize Press Release

Former UNCCD Executive Secretary Luc Gnacadja honored with Cook Prize at BGU's International Drylands, Deserts, and Desertification Conference

Sede Boqer, Israel, November 18, 2014 – The Jeffery Cook Prize in Desert Architecture was awarded to Former Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Luc Gnacadja on Monday evening at the International Drylands, Deserts and Desertification Conference in Sede Boqer. The 5<sup>th</sup> annual conference, organized by Ben-Gurion University of the Negev's Blaustein Institutes for Desert Research (BIDR), has drawn hundreds of people from around the world to share knowledge, technologies and initiatives to combat desertification during the four day conference which began on Monday.

"I hope that receiving this prestigious prize will bring attention to the role urban planning and architecture plays in desertification. A new report from India shows that air pollution is responsible for a 50% percent drop in agricultural product. So the built environment has a large impact on the food baskets of the world," the architect and former Minister of Environment Housing and Urban Planning of Benin says.

The Jeffrey Cook Prize in Desert Architecture is sponsored by the Jeffrey Cook Foundation.

"Luc Gnacadja is the kind of architect that stretches the conventional borders of the professional domain to address the broader issues of planning development and construction and their impact, especially in the drylands," the committee wrote in the prize citation.

Born in Benin, Luc Gnacadja earned an architecture degree at the African Crafts School of Architecture and Urbanism in Lomé, Togo, and later studied at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government and the World Bank Institute. He served as Minister of Environment, Housing and Urban Development in Benin (1999-2005) where he represented the country as the head of delegation to the UNCCD and at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and Convention on Biological Diversity. Soon thereafter he was elected to be the Executive Secretary of the UNCCD and UN Assistant Secretary-General where he served with distinction from 2007 to 2013.

"During the past decade, Luc's was a guiding voice for sustainable land development in the negotiations leading up to Rio+20, the June 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development. His personal efforts to promote adoption of an international commitment to a "land degradation-neutral world" was deemed a critical step forward," according to the committee led by Prof. David Perlmutter, chair of the Bona Terra Department of Man in the Desert at the BIDR.

In Gnacadja's words – "This is the final piece of the puzzle that can unite the challenge of land degradation with the tools at our disposal and the level of ambition needed to achieve the future we want." The international community affirmed his vision in *The Future We Want*, the outcome document adopted in Rio.

A passionate advocate for sustainable development, landscapes and their ecological restoration, Gnacadja continues to work for international policies to ensure land stewardship and restoration, so that future generations will enjoy the benefits of healthy and productive land and healthy communities in the drylands. He has launched GPS-Dev (Governance & Policies for Sustainable Development), which he calls, "a think tank for doers."

In 2002, Gnacadja received a Green Award from the World Bank for promoting environment-friendly public expenditure reform in Benin.

The Cook Prize for Desert Architecture is named after the late Prof. Jeffrey Cook, who was a central figure in the field of passive and low-energy architecture and who, throughout his years in Arizona, had a special commitment to appropriate architectural design in the desert. The award is for lifetime contribution to a sustainable green environment. Gnacadja is the fourth recipient of this prestigious prize.