

Narrative Biography of Ismail BELEN for the Executive
Secretary of UNCCD



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Aim of this Biography

This biography has been prepared in relation to my application for Executive Secretary of the UNCCD with narrative and unofficial format. It has three sections;

- My resume,
- Self-evaluation for this application,
- My very draft and basic work plan.

My official curriculum vitae also included.

Information about me and my professional background

I am a Turkish Citizen, born 1972, in a remote village of province of Ordu. *My parents still live there!* I got my first education in the village then I move to Samsun (relatively a big city) for high school (6 years after first education).

Then I started to University Education at Forestry Faculty and I graduated from Karadeniz (Black Sea) Technical University *as a Forest Engineer*.

In early 1992, I started to work for the government *as Forest Ranger at field level*. At the end of 1998, I moved to Ankara, to Head Office of the Ministry.

During my works at the field I had the opportunity to see and *examine rural areas* and natural resources, I worked with *local communities*, I made harvesting, firefighting, plantation, erosion and flood control activities and I learned conflict management! It was very different and wonderful experience.

At the Head Office, I worked as Engineer, Division Director, Head of Department, Chief of the Cabinet to the Minister and Deputy Director General, respectively.

The General Directorate of Afforestation and Erosion Control which I worked as Head of Department, *with nearly five thousands staffs*, was responsible for all activities related to combating desertification at national level.

During this term I also served as *the Focal Point for UNCCD for a while*. I was mainly responsible for international cooperation, general coordination, budgetary issues, education and information technology. I worked for *Middle East Watersheds Monitoring and Evaluation Project* for a while and I had the chance to learn the situation *in Israel, Jordan, and Palestine and to see the implementation in the USA*. Please see one of the reports about this project at the following linkⁱ.

In 2005, I started to work *with HE Minister of Environment and Forestry as `Chief of the Cabinet`*. It was very different and exiting experience for me. I served two and half year at this post. During this term, I worked with the Minister with `first hand`. We paid visit to some countries. We visited most of the Turkish cities. I participated to so many different meetings and learned a lot on different things like general policy, *managing a complex organization with nearly seventy thousands staffs including from environment, natural resources, meteorology, forestry, and climate circles*.

In 2007, I started to work at General Directorate of Forestry as Deputy Director General. In this term, I was mainly responsible for international cooperation, training for the staff and other related people, information technology, geographical information system, collaboration with civil society, relations with media, and relation with private sector.

General Directorate of Forestry is one of the biggest public organizations of Turkey. About one quarter of Turkey is forest (22 million ha) and these areas are under the responsibility of GD of Forestry. Starting from cadastral works, managing, harvesting, regenerating, planting, supporting forest villagers, firefighting, in other words, everything is under its responsibility. GD of Forestry has more than *thirty thousand* staffs.

In this term, I tried *to open Turkish Forestry to the World* and actually we accomplished. It was very good opportunity *to understand the United Nations Systems*. Together with my wonderful team;

- We organized several international meetings, workshops and conferences in Turkey. Including UNFF10.
- We participated to several international conferences like UNFF9, Forest Europe Ministerial Conference, COFO of FAO, and Mediterranean Forestry Week.

- We started to undertake some international assignments in UNECE TC, Forest Europe, and FAO.
- We started to several projects both national and international ranging different areas.
- We hosted several delegations from different region and countries like Hungary, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the United States of America, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Morocco, Finland and several countries from Africa.

Information technology was also among priority areas for me. If I give an example, the web page of GF of Forestry had only around one thousand daily visitors in the beginning of 2007. Now it has one hundred thousand daily visitors and it is main platform for the staffs and others. We prepared a big and an umbrella project on “Forest Information System” with the total *budget of nearly 25 million Dollars*. Now it is under implementation!

Additionally, one of the biggest achievements we gained from IT is technologically put out forest fires. We set up a web based system for forest fires which has remote control systems with my team. Now fires (including area information, vehicles, trucks, planes, helicopters, people, and wireless systems) can be managed from a command panel in DG Forestry, from Ankara to whole Turkey. Time to reach the scene is 12 minutes at least with this system. Our projects won several national awards related with e-government.

In 2011, I have been appointed to *General Directorate of Combating Desertification and Erosion* as Deputy Director General. From August 2011 to date, I have been working here with my full happiness like always. Here, I have been able to work more closely with *Northern Mediterranean, African and Central Asian Countries* which are affected desertification and drought.

At present;

- I am one of the International Experts of FAO’s Project for **Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan**.
- **Member** of Advisory Committee of FORESTERRAⁱⁱ Project (2012-2015) which aims to **reinforce the scientific coordination** and integration with Mediterranean-area countries and with countries from other Mediterranean Climate Areas (MCA) in this case, **Australia, South Africa, Chile and California**.
- I was the Chair of the steering committee of “Capacity Building in Sustainable Forest Management Planning and Forest Fire Management in **Syria**ⁱⁱⁱ” Project, 2010-2011

- I was a Member of the “Regional project” entitled “Adapting Forest Policy Conditions to Climate Change in the Mena Region^{iv}” (**Morocco, Algeria, Tunis, Syria, Lebanon and Turkey**), 2009-2011.
- I was Member of The Middle East Watershed Monitoring and Evaluation Project^v, **Israel, Jordan, Palestine, Turkey and the United States**,2004
- I visited to **South Africa, Cuba, Niger, Senegal, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Israel, Kazakhstan, the USA (Colorado)** for study tour and meetings several times.

My Education

During this term, I also continued the educational issues. I got two master degrees. The first one is on natural resources from Karadeniz (Black Sea) Technical University. The other is about public administration from Institute of Public Administration for Turkey and Middle East (Accredited by European Association for Public Administration Accreditation)

Currently I am having my Doctorate on Public Management.

With this line, I am going to attend to Harvard University program for Senior Managers in Government starting 21 of July to 9 of August, 2013.

My Family and Me

Family relation is at the center of my life!

I was born 1972, in a remote village of province of Ordu. My relatives including my father and mother *still live there*! It's about eight hours from Ankara by car and I am looking forward to be there as soon as I can.

I got married in1996. My wife, Ms. Züleyha Belen is a lawyer. She has been working for The Central Union of the Agricultural Credit Cooperatives of Turkey for last 15 years^{vi}.

I have two sons. Furkan (17) keeps going his high school and plays guitar! Mustafa (10) is at first education. He is a fond of computer game and very good on the draw cartoons!

For myself, I like reading, meeting, speaking, walking, and swimming. Especially in weekends, I read nearly ten newspapers. I follow nearly all related web pages regularly including the Official Gazette of Turkey!

I like writing. Handwriting is my special interest but I also like writing with keyboard. I prefer SMS and email to call! I have so many reports, mainly Turkish.

I believe the importance of cultural diversity. I believe that, monoculture in society is a threat and very fragile like monoculture in forests. Diversity and respect for the others are very important.

Children and youths are very important for my life! There has been always youths at my teams. I believe women sensitivity and dedication in working life is very important especially in the fight of corruption and the quality of workforce.

I like being a member of a team. I like working with the others! I have several friends from several circles in Turkey and abroad. I like working with Civil Society Organizations. I also like to be with academicians. That's why I completed two masters programs and now I am having my doctorate.

On the other hand, I believe that private sector is the main factor for development.

My Relation with UNCCD!

In the beginning of 2003, I started to work at the General Directorate of Afforestation and Erosion Control as the Head of Department and just after my appointment, my department designated as responsible unit for UNCCD.

I worked as National Focal Point for a while and I attended to;

- Second Workshop for Northern Mediterranean focal points on regional cooperation activities within Annex IV^{vii}, Switzerland in 2003,
- UNCCD COP6 together with the HE Minister.

Listening to Hugo Chavez Frías, President of the Bolivarian Republic Of Venezuela^{viii} was very exciting during this Conference. I translated it to Turkish and disseminate to my colleagues. It was also very good opportunity for me to examine a *South American Country's* situation.

In 2011, I started to work as Deputy Director General for Combating Desertification and Erosion. I am responsible for “Department of Combating Desertification” and international relations on behalf of my institute.

Together with a huge delegation, we attend to UNCCD COP10, we executed so many programs. Last year, in 2012, we prepared “Turkish National Strategy on Combating Desertification^{ix}” with the line of UNCCD Ten-Year Strategy (2008-2018).

We have worked in Africa, we shared our experiences, and we set up plantations, well-shafts and planted. It affected me to combat with desertification. Because I saw with my eyes what it will be if we don't prevent the decertification!

My Advantages and Weaknesses for being Executive Secretary

Of course, I am aware of its importance! That's why I tried to collect all my information!

My advantages;

- I like working internationally! I will be very happy and will have the honor.
- My family and my country always will be support of me!
- The geographical situation of Turkey and the willingness of the Government on working internationally is very important. *Turkish special interest to Central Asia, Middle East and Africa where the desertification effects* severely could be taken into consideration. I believe that I have enough resource both from Turkey and others countries.
- I have enough experiences on public management. In my previous post, *I worked at an organization with more than 30 thousands staff operates nationally*. So, I have enough skills to manage a complex organization, as well the ability to mobilize various forms of support from multi-stakeholders and partners.

- Information technology is my special interest which is very important for international cooperation. I use social media.
- I have enough understanding of the United Nations system, in particular the closely related United Nations Conventions on Climate Change.
- During most of my career, I was responsible for international cooperation. *I know most of the people related to forestry personally.* I visited several countries even at the field level. Please kindly see my official CV for more information. We organized several study tours in Turkey with the participation of different countries and continents.
- I can find reference people for the Secretary-General's own search and consultations.
- Above all I want this career with all my heart.

My weaknesses and solutions;

- I have not worked at any UN Organization so far. *But I am familiar with United Nations Systems.*
- I am not able to speak any foreign language other than English. *During my first and high school education I had learned Arabic and French. So, it will not be so difficult to recall them at least basic and communication level.*
- The Existing Executive Secretary was a former Minister. *I am just a "Deputy Director General". But I am not so away to political arena. I worked as "Chief of the Cabinet to the Minister" for two and half year. I worked for General Directorate of Forestry for nearly 4 years which has 30 thousands staffs as the Deputy Director General. Furthermore, I believe that, if I placed at the short listed, the Government of Turkey is going to do necessary arrangements.*
- I am male! *There is nothing to do for this but, during my terms I have been always supportive to females. As I indicated above, my wife is working as a Lawyer. So I am aware their advantages in working life and I believe women are the basic and actually basin for human being like the soil. My friends from international fore could say something about my approaches.*

My Work Plan

When I have been included to the short list;

- I will prepare my draft plan of work as the Executive Secretary for next term. It will certainly include;
 - A report to elaborate on the history of the convention, its success and failures, the barriers countries faced to comply with the requirements; which solutions I would recommend
 - Another report to bring countries around the table. Resource mobilization is very important but a socioeconomic assessment of the convention and financial measures at the national level is a necessity if we want to comply successfully with the convention
 - A special program in order to link this convention to the other UN convention and *indicate the issue of One UN*.
- I will meet with Turkish Government immediately and want their support both for political, administrative and financial issues. With my personal capacity, I will search the people and country to support me and to ease the Secretary General's decision.
- I will start to learn French and Arabic languages immediately. Actually I am a bit familiar with these two languages and will not be so difficult to learn at least for minimum conversation.

When I have been assigned as the Executive Secretary;

- I am going to work in close cooperation and collaboration with existing staff and circles, including the UNCCD COP Bureau and Secretary General himself and his team.
- I will prepare my plan of work together with them and other related colleagues and parties. The Secretariat of CBD, the Secretariat of UNFCCC, World Water Forum, FAO, UNFF, UNECE TC, Forest Europe, and African Union Commission will be among of top priority partners.

As of 26 June, 2013

- Mobilization of the resources will be one of my main agenda item. In order to have more financial resources; I will visit the specific countries invite them to have Memorandum of Understanding with the Secretariat.
- Finding partners from Private Sector, Civil Society and Academic Circles is also very important.
- I am going to submit my plan of work to the Parties during UNCCD COP12 to be held in 2015 and we will start to implement immediately. Until this time, I will prepare a short term plan of work with the line of above mentioned priorities.

My Final Words for ES of UNCCD

- I strongly believe that, desertification, drought and land degradation is a more real and proven threat for the humankind and globe, not only for specific countries but for all of them and for all kind of land and soil type. Fortunately we have the chance for solution.
- The UNCCD and Secretariat is a perfect platform under the UN Umbrella for these problems and solutions. They have done wonderful things so far!
- I am ready and willing to do something for myself, for my family, for my country and *of course for the globe.*

Related Links

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- ⁱ http://www.cem.gov.tr/erozyon/Files/faaliyetler/dis_iliskiler/Final_Report-17_March_2005.pdf
- ⁱⁱ <http://www.foreserra.eu/>
- ⁱⁱⁱ <http://web.ogm.gov.tr/Haberler/HaberGoruntule.aspx?List=b5227992-7788-41c4-8a38-24e745c3108e&ID=8112> or <http://web.ogm.gov.tr/diger/SuriyeProjesi/Sayfalar/default.aspx> or <http://foris.fao.org/static/data/silva-med/fao-syria-capacity-building-sustainable-forest-management.pdf>
- ^{iv} <http://web.ogm.gov.tr/diger/mena/english/Sayfalar/WorkingGroup.aspx> or <http://www.giz-cpmf.org/>
- ^v <http://www.fs.fed.us/global/globe/europe/mideast.htm#2>
- ^{vi} <http://int.tarimkredi.org.tr/index.php/en.html>
- ^{vii} <http://www.unccd.int/Lists/SiteDocumentLibrary/Regions/NM/meetings/regional/FP2003/participants-eng.pdf>
- ^{viii} <http://www.cem.gov.tr/erozyon/Files/disiliskiler/copwebsayfas%C4%B1/COP6-Chavezin%20Konu%C5%9Fmas%C4%B1%20%C4%B0ngilizce.pdf>
- ^{ix} <http://www.collesmestrategie.com/>