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FIRST U.N. EVENT IN ISRAEL TO BE HELD AT BEN-GURION UNIVERSITY OF THE NEGEV FOCUSING ON DESERT RESEARCH

- Conference Will Highlight the University's Leadership in Addressing a Critical Worldwide Issue -

NEW YORK— Oct. 18, 2006 – More than 200 participants from over 30 countries are expected to participate in an international conference held under the auspices of the Jacob Blaustein Institutes for Desert Research at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification – Annex IV nations (UNCCD). The conference will take place November 6-9, 2006 at the University's Sede Boqer campus, with special excursions throughout the Negev.

This conference marks the first time that a U.N. General Assembly resolution has welcomed an Israeli initiative on an issue that is high on the global agenda, and acknowledges the State of Israel's leadership role in the worldwide battle against desertification. The United Nations declared 2006 "The International Year of Deserts and Desertification."

Many nations in Africa, Central Asia, and South America are affected by the ravages of desertification, leading to famines and the reduction of habitable living space in societies around the globe. Israel is the only country in the world where the desert is receding.

Expected participants include Ambassador Gregoire de Kalbermatten, deputy general secretary of the UNCCD; Dr. David A. Mouat, chair, UNCCD Group of Experts, Desert Research Institute, Reno, Nevada; Dr. Vandana Shiva, a leading environmentalist in the developing world, India. Minister of the Environment Gideon Ezra and Vice Prime-Minister Shimon Peres will represent the Israeli government at the gathering. The chairman of the organizing committee for the conference, Dr. Alon Tal, currently serves as professor of environmental policy at Ben-Gurion University's Blaustein Institutes for Desert Research.

In addition to keynote speaker Dr. David A. Mouat, several desertification specialists from the United States are attending, including Professors Uriel Safriel and Inbal Reshef from the University of Maryland, Prof. Rattan Lal of Ohio State University, and Paul Siegel of the World Bank. From Columbia University, Dr. Jeffrey Sachs will speak via videolink about the effects of desertification on poverty.

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Each of the four days of the conference focus on a specific theme.

- ◆ Day one will discuss both the opportunities and challenges of deserts.
- ◆ Day two will focus on the direct and indirect drivers of desertification and policy intervention.
- ◆ Day three will explore the unique opportunities that drylands and deserts offer and includes trips to see Israel's efforts firsthand in water management and agriculture, arid forestry, desert eco-tourism and alternative energy.
- ◆ Day four will discuss real world case studies, both successful and unsuccessful, of efforts towards sustainable development.

“This four day event will highlight the important contribution that BGU is making in the effort to alleviate the ravages of desertification, and provide a great opportunity for further advancement and collaboration among Israel's neighbors and countries all over the world,” explains Amos Drory, executive vice president of American Associates, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. “It will demonstrate how we are reclaiming the desert by making desert studies and desertification issues a priority at the University,” he said.

For more information on the conference agenda, please visit www.desertification.bgu.ac.il

About Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and American Associates

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev is a world-renowned institute of research and higher learning with 17,000 students on its three campuses in Israel's southern desert: Beer-Sheva, Sede Boqer and Eilat. BGU builds bridges of peace between Israel and its neighbors through cooperation in science, research and development. It is the link between academia and industry, Israel and the developing world. BGU is a university with a conscience, where the highest academic standards are integrated with community involvement, and where the pioneering spirit of discovery flourishes, fulfilling the dream of Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, to make the desert bloom. American Associates, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (AABGU), with its national headquarters in New York City and 10 regional offices throughout the United States, plays a vital role in helping BGU develop the bold new vision for the Negev, the focus of the future of Israel and the world.

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