Trees as far as the eye can see are the weapons one Iraqi province is using in the fight against desertification.

Karbala is the location of a six-year-old project aimed at fighting worsening desertification in Iraq. The green belt, a 27 km (17 mile) crescent lined with thousands of young trees in orderly patterns, irrigated by dozens of wells. There are plans to widen the green belt “ten-fold” in the near future.

The project has involved the planting of 62,000 olive trees, 20,500 palm trees, 37,000 eucalyptus trees and 4,200 tamarind trees, all of which were chosen for their root strength as well as for the food some will produce.

Previously, the area was used as a military encampment but is now the front line of Karbala’s battle against increasingly frequent sandstorms and salinization of the land.