

UNCCD COP 17 Highlights: Monday, 17 August 2026

The 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 17) of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) opened on Monday, 17 August. The COP elected Batmunkh Battsetseg, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mongolia, as COP 17 President, heard opening statements, and addressed organizational matters. In the afternoon, the Committee of the Whole (COW) and Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) convened in parallel sessions, beginning discussions on the budget, drought, and the effective implementation of the Convention at national, subregional, and regional levels.

Opening Ceremony

Following a cultural performance, Nyam-Osoryn Uchral, Prime Minister of Mongolia, welcomed participants to Mongolia and urged them to make COP 17 a platform for solutions and open dialogue, turning commitments into tangible results. Highlighting the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP), he stressed the importance of protecting these ecosystems that connect people, food, and nature.

UNCCD Executive Secretary Yasmine Fouad highlighted that Mongolia illustrates how land restoration and degradation links to livelihood, food security, water security, and future generations. She urged participants to work towards repairing ecosystems and restoring livelihoods, resilience, and hope in the multilateral system.

Plenary

COP 16 President Osama Ibrahim Faqeeha (Saudi Arabia) opened COP 17.

In his opening statement, Faqeeha called on the COP to build on the international momentum following the outcomes of COP 16 as a historic turning point in enabling a broad participation of stakeholders, and focusing on water and food security, biodiversity, climate adaptation, and social welfare.

In her opening statement, COP 17 President Battsetseg highlighted the profound relevance of the Convention to Mongolia. Noting that “we are united by our care for the Earth,” she called on Parties to work together to restore hope. Noting Mongolia’s role in initiating the IYRP, she underscored the global value of rangelands, as well as the knowledge and livelihoods of pastoralists.

Drawing attention to recent extreme droughts, UNCCD Executive Secretary Fouad stressed that drought presents a systemic risk to food and water security, international commerce, energy supply, stability, and prosperity. She called for inclusive and people-centered implementation that guarantees water and food security, a healthy ecosystem, and community livelihoods. Drawing attention to the Global Pastoralist Declaration, she

called on Parties to make rangelands a global policy and investment priority. Highlighting the links between migration and desertification, land degradation, and drought (DLDD), she welcomed land restoration as a preventive action to ensure prosperity, stability, and security.

Opening Statements: Côte d’Ivoire, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, called for strengthening financial resources for the Secretariat and getting an agreement to reinforce cooperation on drought. They further suggested the continuation of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Future Strategic Framework (IWG-FSF) with clear terms of reference.

India, on behalf of the ASIA-PACIFIC GROUP, supported the continued development of an FSF that provides institutional capacity and resources for DLDD. They encouraged reaching agreement on a decision on drought that is not prescriptive but tailored to the country context and supported a budget decision that enables the Secretariat to fulfill its mandate.

Paraguay, on behalf of the LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN GROUP (GRULAC), supported a results-oriented FSF, grounded in science and supported by robust indicators. They called for expanding financial flows, and for developed countries to respect their obligations.

The EU highlighted the opportunity of the “triple COP semester” for the Rio Conventions, noting it is in the interest of everyone that these multilateral agreements support each other and further policy coherence. They underscored the importance of redirecting finance by tackling harmful subsidies contributing to DLDD.

Spain, on behalf of the IMPLEMENTATION ANNEX FOR THE NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN, stressed that investing in sustainable land management is not only central for environmental sustainability but also for enhancing the economic resilience of communities. They called for science to remain at the heart of the Convention, stressing that reliable data is important for informed decision-making and facilitating early-warning processes.

Egypt, on behalf of the LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES, underscored that drought affects water, food, peace, and security. They stressed that fair and just water management must be based on international law and principles of fair usage and no-harm. They called for enhancing resource mobilization to support implementation.

Azerbaijan, for the IMPLEMENTATION ANNEX FOR CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE, underscored that DLDD is not just an environmental objective, but imperative for supporting livelihoods and building more sustainable societies. They stressed that science, technology, and knowledge sharing must remain at the heart of the Convention.

Onon Sodov, Mongolian Association of Elderly People, on behalf of CIVIL SOCIETY, highlighted three priorities: effective and meaningful participation of civil society; investment in

local land action to achieve land degradation neutrality (LDN); and integration of civil society perspectives in future planning, science-policy work, and reporting.

Adoption of the Agenda: COP 17 President Battsetseg presented the draft agenda ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/1/Rev.1](#)) for adoption. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION opposed adopting the agenda, saying that Central Asian experts did not get to participate in the work of the IWG-FSF (Agenda item 3). They said they would withdraw their objection if Russian scientists are permitted to take up their “rightful roles.”

BRAZIL requested including an agenda item on bioeconomy and its relevance to drylands. India, on behalf of the IMPLEMENTATION ANNEX FOR ASIA, opposed adding a new agenda item due to time restraints, prompting BRAZIL to withdraw its proposal.

The US objected to three agenda items: synergies (Agenda item 4); gender (sub-item of Agenda item 5); and civil society (Agenda item 8(a)). The EU and BRAZIL expressed support for the draft agenda, including work on gender and synergies.

COP 17 President Battsetseg proposed provisionally adopting the agenda, deferring adoption on items 3, 4, 5 and 8(a), which will require further consultations. There was no objection.

Election of Officers: The COP elected the following as Vice-Presidents: Côte d’Ivoire and Cameroon (African Group); Cook Islands (Asia-Pacific); Brazil and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (GRULAC); and France and Switzerland (Western European and Others Group). President Battsetseg said the election of the two Vice-Presidents from the Eastern European Group and the Rapporteur will take place at a later date.

Establishment of Subsidiary Bodies: The plenary agreed to establish the COW to be chaired by Khalid Cherki (Morocco).

Accreditation of intergovernmental organizations, civil society organizations and representatives from the private sector, and admission of observers: The COP adopted [ICCD/COP\(17\)/INF.6](#), taking note in the report of AZERBAIJAN’s objection to the accreditation of two NGOs.

Committee of the Whole

COW Chair Khalid Cherki opened the meeting Monday afternoon, asking delegates to be open and adopt a collaborative approach. He established two contact groups. The COW approved Marine Collignon (France) as facilitator of the contact group on all other matters. Cherki will facilitate the contact group on budget until a facilitator is approved.

Programme and Budget: The Secretariat introduced the programme and budget for the biennium 2027–2028 ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/7](#) and [ICCD/COP\(17\)/INF.1](#)), financial performance for the Convention trust funds ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/INF.3](#)), report on the status of contributions to the Convention trust funds (2025–2026) ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/INF.7](#)), and the report of the Evaluation Office ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/INF.2](#)). The Secretariat noted three budget scenarios: a zero nominal growth scenario, a zero real growth scenario, and a 28.69% increase to include three additional positions. The UN Board of Auditors provided an overview of its [financial and performance audit reports](#). Next, the Secretariat introduced the report of the evaluation office ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/INF.2](#))

The EU urged that current shortfalls in budget contributions be addressed. BRAZIL stressed that while budget discipline is necessary, it should not lead to freezing necessary posts. They noted that financial sustainability requires full payment of contributions but should avoid additional burdens on developing countries.

CHINA suggested the Secretariat should reform and standardize its financial processes to ensure the effective use of

resources. They proposed that the COP urge Parties with payments in arrears to fulfill their obligations.

JAPAN supported the zero nominal growth budget, stressing the importance of cost-effective and efficient management of funding, and proposed that additional operational costs be covered by voluntary contributions and external mechanisms.

South Africa, for the AFRICAN GROUP, underscored that an adequate budget is essential for delivering on commitments, and stressed that the region cannot accept an increased mandate without commensurate additional resources.

MOROCCO stressed that voluntary contributions cannot substitute regular budget funding and called for a balanced, results-based budget.

CIVIL SOCIETY called for stronger financial commitments and underscored the importance of investing directly in local actors and grassroots organizations.

Chair Cherki proposed, and delegates agreed, to send this agenda item to the budget contact group.

Drought: The Secretariat introduced the relevant documents ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/11](#) and [ICCD/COP\(16\)/24/Add.1](#)).

TOGO called for a legal framework on drought with a follow-up mechanism. South Africa, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, emphasized that a dedicated global drought protocol is necessary for a framework to address drought.

The EU expressed the importance of advancing the global response to drought, called on Parties to be flexible, and affirmed their commitment to a balanced outcome on drought. SURINAME called for better drought monitoring, integrated land and water management, and technical capacity, arguing that drought policies and instruments under the Convention should be flexible and country-driven, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

REPUBLIC OF KOREA expressed hope that Parties will pool their wisdom and adopt a decision that contains practical measures and actions on the ground to address drought under the Convention. OMAN supported international efforts to improve capacity to respond to droughts, taking into account the national contexts of each state, and noted the importance of regional cooperation and exchange of knowledge and expertise.

BRAZIL said drought is no longer an exceptional event, but a structural development challenge. They called for Parties to take this opportunity to strengthen the response to drought and leave Ulaanbaatar with a strong commitment. SYRIA, with SENEGAL and BHUTAN, noted the main challenge is to shift from drought management to a proactive response through prediction, early warning, and early action. They stressed that the response to drought should address the needs of local communities.

To enable a predictable and coordinated response to drought, MOROCCO, ZIMBABWE, and EGYPT aligned with the AFRICAN GROUP’s proposal. The UK did not support a legally-binding protocol, and encouraged Parties to explore alternative options. SAUDI ARABIA encouraged stronger action on drought, calling for Parties to build on the foundation achieved in COP 16. URUGUAY called for a decisive commitment with necessary resources to enable action on the ground. CHINA stated the procedural resolution adopted at COP 16 is a good basis for discussion. AUSTRALIA encouraged building the COP 17 drought outcome on existing tools and initiatives, while they did not support a legally binding instrument.

Noting the increased drought effects on small island developing states (SIDS), SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS emphasized the need for continued financial, scientific, and technological support. BHUTAN called for regional cooperation, capacity-building, technology transfer, and predictable and accessible finance.

COOK ISLANDS cautioned that a legally binding protocol could increase country obligations without necessarily increasing their capacities, and supported a flexible, country-driven framework. The INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE (IUCN) suggested that a framework on drought should embed high-integrity nature-based solutions on drought planning and response.

The FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UN (FAO) noted that the agricultural sector bears 80% of all economic losses caused by drought and called for closing the gap between global pledges and national implementation. Emphasizing the role of meteorological and hydrological services, the WORLD METEOROLOGICAL ORGANIZATION (WMO) drew attention to their work on the development of 10 regional proposals, covering 42 parties, with funding that exceeds USD 240 million.

Stressing gender-responsive drought policies and proactive drought management, CIVIL SOCIETY called for increasing finance, capacity-building, and technological cooperation.

Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention

On Monday afternoon, CRIC Chair Philippine Dutailly opened the meeting, emphasizing the importance of inclusive, science-based policies to support implementation of the Convention. She stressed that promoting synergies across the Rio Conventions is the most economical solution to combat DLDD.

UNCCD Executive Secretary Fouad stressed that Parties face a decisive moment for implementation and highlighted three priorities: mobilizing resources at scale to deliver on implementation of the Convention and SDG 15.3 (end desertification and restore degraded land); strengthening capacity-building for women, youth, and local communities; and enhancing monitoring and reporting.

Angola, on behalf of the IMPLEMENTATION ANNEX FOR AFRICA, lauded progress made by the Intergovernmental Working Group on Drought, but emphasized financial resources for implementation of the Convention remain inadequate and misaligned with the scale and urgency of DLDD.

China, on behalf of the IMPLEMENTATION ANNEX FOR ASIA, emphasized implementation of the Convention must be nationally driven, scientifically informed, and supported by strong international cooperation.

Brazil, speaking on behalf of GRULAC, drew attention to the annual USD 278 billion finance gap and stressed additional adequate, predictable, and accessible finance, demand-driven capacity-building, technology transfer, and knowledge exchange.

Montenegro, on behalf of the IMPLEMENTATION ANNEX FOR CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE, stated that accessible finance remains a key priority for the region. They encouraged the Global Mechanism to mobilize diverse sources to support scaling up the LDN Target Setting Programme 2.0 and facilitate the implementation of investment-ready LDN projects.

Kyrgyzstan, for CENTRAL ASIA and RUSSIA, called for addressing: discrepancies between global indicators and national data; fragmentation of departmental data; the lack of qualified specialists familiar with GIS and remote sensing; and limited reflection of national indicators on global methodologies.

The DOMINICAN REPUBLIC reported on progress made establishing their LDN targets and stressed the need for adequate funding, especially for SIDS.

IUCN welcomed the commitment to scale up LDN target-setting and promote integrated land use planning as the means of embedding those targets in national planning.

Adoption of the agenda and organization of work: The CRIC adopted the agenda and organization of work ([ICCD/CRIC\(24\)/1/Rev.1](#)) and agreed to the establishment of a contact group, appointing Charles Lange (Kenya) as facilitator.

Effective implementation of the Convention at national, subregional and regional levels: Review of the report of the CRIC on its twenty-third session: Rapporteur Lange presented the report ([ICCD/CRIC\(23\)/8](#)). He highlighted conclusions and recommendations to further the implementation of the Convention and the 2018-2030 Strategic Framework, including on, *inter alia*: voluntary LDN targets; policy frameworks and thematic issues for sand and dust storms, and land tenure; and the development and promotion of activities for targeted capacity-building.

CIVIL SOCIETY expressed their appreciation to the CRIC for its efforts to support implementation. However, they stressed that success must not be measured only by policies, reports, and strategies, but by results on the ground that empower communities and improve living conditions.

Performance of Convention Institutions and Subsidiary Bodies: The Secretariat presented the report ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/INF.4](#)) and highlighted, among others, that 116 countries have completed their LDN targets, and 22 projects to implement action toward those targets were supported with a total of USD 1.48 billion in financing.

Programme and budget for the biennium 2027–2028: The Secretariat presented an integrated, results-based budget and work programme ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/7](#)) that outlines the content of proposed work as well as the cost of expected results. They stated the priorities of the work programme remain focused on the interlinked agendas of land and drought, brought forward through expanding stakeholder involvement and increased organizational effectiveness.

COW Contact Groups

Both COW contact groups met in the evening. In the COW contact group on all other matters, delegates discussed how to move forward with drought. While most delegations agreed to use the bracketed text that was annexed to the COP 16 decision on drought, one delegation reiterated its rejection of this text. After a lengthy procedural discussion, Facilitator Collignon proposed, and participants eventually agreed, that they begin on Tuesday with a higher-level discussion on what they want from this decision and use the text from COP 16 simply as an aide to the discussion and not begin line-by-line negotiations on that text.

In the Corridors

During this International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists, COP 17 opened at an auspicious time. As the first of the three Rio Conventions to hold COPs in 2026, COP 17 has the opportunity to set the tone for what could be a pivotal year, an observation reflected by many during the opening plenary. However, the meeting had barely begun before Parties were reminded of ongoing geopolitical realities when the US refused to adopt agenda items on synergies, gender, and civil society, and the Russian Federation objected to the agenda item on the post-2030 strategic framework.

Some expressed concern that this would pose a blow to continued progress on these pivotal issues. Many had hoped that COP 17 would set the stage for the next strategic framework, give the Secretariat new or renewed mandates to collaborate with other Conventions and organizations, and operationalize the new Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities caucuses, among other important matters. As noted by one civil society participant, “Without us, impact cannot be created and Parties cannot achieve their mandates.”

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