

UNCCD COP 17 Highlights Tuesday, 25 August 2026

Tuesday was “Water Day” at the 17th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP 17). Given that drought is a core threat to water security around the world, it was therefore fitting that a Ministerial Dialogue was held on drought resilience. The Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) began discussing their programme of work, followed by a COP open dialogue session with civil society. Throughout the day, the contact groups for the Committee of the Whole (COW), CRIC, and Committee on Science and Technology (CST) met to continue negotiations.

Special High-Level Segment

Ministerial dialogue on drought resilience: In his opening statement, Nyamtaishiryn Nomtoibayar, Deputy Prime Minister of Mongolia, reflected on the impacts of drought on Mongolian landscapes, food systems, and communities. He announced the launch of the Water-Land Nexus Initiative, which will support policy and knowledge systems, and scalable solutions for rangeland and soil management, while fostering partnerships and financing through existing mechanisms under the Convention.

Amina J. Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary-General, emphasized the importance of building sustained international cooperation to address drought by connecting national action across borders, turning drought plans into programmes that can attract investments, and accelerating implementation through institutional and financial mechanisms under the Convention. She urged Parties to build on the technical and financial foundations of COP 16 and overcome the substantive differences to reach a decision on drought.

Yasmine Fouad, UNCCD Executive Secretary, reflected on the increased frequency and intensity of drought expected due to El Niño in 2026. She called for the operationalization of existing means of implementation. She urged Parties to gavel a decision on drought, stressing that, even if it is not reached, willing Parties will continue moving “because this is the COP of implementation.”

Two panel discussions on drought ensued. The first brought together representatives from ministries to share national experiences and lessons from drought response. In addition to increased water use restrictions, efficiency, and other engineering solutions, the panelists noted, among others, the need for policy integration and fostering coordination on climate adaptation across ministries and public policies. Recalling the crucial role data, monitoring, and early warning systems play in supporting drought preparedness, they underlined the transboundary nature of water resources and the importance of cross-border cooperation, political will, and leadership.

The second panel brought together representatives from international organizations to share their experiences on

addressing drought, how the term is conceptualized, and the need to establish drought as an economic and security priority. Panelists discussed, among others, how narrowly defining drought obscures its interconnectedness with food and energy security, as well as labor and economic productivity. They collectively stressed the importance of: moving from crisis management to proactive planning; developing strategic infrastructure; enhancing water governance; and strengthening local institutions and financing to support collaboration between Parties. One panelist called for recognizing water as a “connector” that can bridge the Paris Agreement, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Strategic Framework of the UNCCD.

During ministerial interventions, several Parties highlighted national efforts to combat drought and requirements for increased drought resilience. NAMIBIA, echoed by MARSHALL ISLANDS, PHILIPPINES, HUNGARY, and others, called for shifting from reactive emergency response to proactive preventive action through, *inter alia*, strengthening early warning systems, contingency planning, and ecosystem restoration.

SENEGAL, TUNISIA, GUYANA, ANGOLA, and ITALY noted drought is a structural and systemic threat, and, together with BHUTAN, STATE OF PALESTINE, CHAD, and GUATEMALA, called for holistic, integrated approaches at the nexus of land, water, and climate planning, with BOLIVIA placing water at the heart of resilience. TÜRKIYE, MEXICO, and PANAMA stressed cooperation and synergies across the Rio Conventions.

TUNISIA, ESWATINI, and SOUTH AFRICA called for the adoption of a legally-binding outcome on drought. Along with others, SRI LANKA, SOLOMON ISLANDS, and UGANDA called for enhanced cooperation, capacity building, and technology transfer. COSTA RICA, PAKISTAN, and MALDIVES stressed predictable and accessible funding, with MADAGASCAR pointing towards equitable access to financing through the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership.

ESWATINI and CAMEROON highlighted women are disproportionately affected by drought, while the UN CHILDREN’S FUND noted resilience must reach children. SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS urged a people-centered, innovative, science-based, and sustainable drought response, and CÔTE D’IVOIRE stressed placing people at the heart of resilience, while ensuring decent employment and economic prospects.

MONTENEGRO noted nature-based solutions are effective investments for drought resilience, and underlined, with MEXICO, the role of regional cooperation. AZERBAIJAN, ECUADOR, PORTUGAL, IRAQ, and GUINEA emphasized cooperation between basin countries that share water resources. KYRGYZSTAN proposed developing a mutually beneficial compensation mechanism for regional water use. SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES iterated the need to strengthen cooperation and coordination amongst small island developing states (SIDS).

Open Dialogue Session

Byaruuzanyin Pürevdagva, Governor and Mayor of Ulaanbaatar, opened the Dialogue, emphasizing the importance of multilevel governance in implementing the Convention. He then presented the [Ulaanbaatar Declaration on Local and Regional Governments](#). A keynote address was given by Paul Hallett, British Society of Soil Science, who argued that the climate crisis and land degradation is creating a perfect storm for “drought death spirals” and called for increased observation, monitoring, and the training of researchers to address the crisis.

A panel discussion, moderated by Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, featured community perspectives on addressing land degradation, desertification, and drought (DLDD). Panelists discussed, among others, forest restoration initiatives, mobilizing youth to support land restoration, the drought-land degradation nexus, the need for a human rights-based approach to water management, and the role of rural women in combating DLDD.

The EU, BRAZIL, BELIZE, COSTA RICA, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, PANAMA, HONDURAS, MEXICO, SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS, PERU, GUATEMALA, HAITI, SURINAME, URUGUAY, AUSTRALIA, and the INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE reaffirmed their support for the full, effective participation of CSOs in the implementation of the Convention and called for the establishment of the Indigenous Peoples and local communities caucuses. Various CSOs highlighted the numerous ways in which Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, youth, and pastoralists are integral to land restoration efforts. The ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES FOUNDATION called on governments to redirect harmful subsidies toward sustainable practices.

The Dialogue concluded with a performance by Senegalese musician and UNCCD Goodwill Ambassador Baaba Maal.

Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention

Programme of work for CRIC 25: In the afternoon, the CRIC held a brief session in which the Secretariat introduced the draft decision for the programme of work ([ICCD/CRIC\(24\)/5](#)).

Contact Groups

COW: The COW contact group on other matters continued discussions on **migration**, where positions differed on ways forward following the request by two delegations to postpone discussions until the next COP. Options were considered for ensuring intersessional work on migration continues, while some Parties insisted on a second reading of the draft decision. After lengthy discussions, delegates agreed to ask the Secretariat to draft text on postponing discussions to COP 18.

Delegates then finished the first reading of the draft decision on **rangelands and pastoralists**, where discussions covered: whether and how to reference the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework; if language on tenure should include reference to “secure land tenure rights and equitable access to land and water in line with the Voluntary Guidelines on Tenure” and be “in accordance with national laws”; and exploring possibilities for establishing an International Day of Rangelands and Pastoralists.

During the second reading on **sand and dust storms (SDS)**, delegates progressed but some disagreement remained. Parties agreed on, *inter alia*, recalling the UN General Assembly Decision to proclaim 2025-2034 the UN Decade on Combating SDS. Regarding a preambular paragraph on the exacerbating factors to SDS, one Party wanted to replace reference to climate “change” with “variability.” Regarding a proposed paragraph on effective SDS management responses, Parties agreed that addressing both natural and anthropogenic sources should be key strategic priorities but disagreed on whether addressing these should be “subject to the availability of financial and technical resources.”

Parties also received an update that the Presidency is conducting consultations on **drought**, with the intention to draft a text to serve as the basis of negotiations.

Parties commenced the second reading on **land tenure**. Among things discussed was text supporting smallholder farmers, family farmers, pastoralists, and other rural groups in accessing knowledge and technologies. Here, one Party, opposed by several, insisted on the inclusion of “on voluntary and mutually agreed terms.” Negotiations continued.

CRIC: In the morning, the contract group finished the first reading of the draft decision on **collaboration with the Global Environment Facility (GEF)**. One Party proposed, with some expressing reservations, to recognize that private finance should complement public financial resources, and to urge the GEF to simplify access to its resources and ensure resources programmed through integrated approaches preserve country ownership and avoid fragmentation of resources. Another delegation proposed, and several disagreed, to delete a paragraph encouraging the GEF to leverage synergies among the Rio Conventions and with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In the evening, the group turned its attention to **resource mobilization**. Several countries supported requesting the Global Mechanism (GM) to strengthen its support to developing country Parties, including through country-level financial needs assessment, investment plans, and strategies for accessing international public and private finance. Delegates also debated the scope of collaboration between the GM and regional organizations, multilateral development banks, and international financial institutions.

CST: The contact group continued to deliberate on the **future functioning of the Science-Policy Interface (SPI)**. Delegates agreed to request the Secretariat to continue mobilizing voluntary contributions to support the work of the SPI “with full transparency and no earmarking that influences scientific priorities.” Disagreements remained however on whether this request should be moved to the decision on budget. Parties also debated the modalities for the selection and operationalization of the technical support unit that will assist with the development of the 4th edition of the Global Land Outlook.

In the evening, the group completed a first reading of the **work programme for the SPI for the 2027–2030 quadrennium**. Delegates agreed, among others, to adapt the draft decision, with the help of the Secretariat, based on the outcome of the discussions on the future functioning of the SPI.

In the Corridors

“We’re not trying to find a way forward because there is none.” With that bleak statement, the substantive discussions on migration ended, postponing them for the next COP. The decision on drought is also hanging by a thread, with the Presidency trying to find a way forward through intense bilateral negotiations that started on Monday night and continued throughout Tuesday.

But while discussions on some agenda items have stalled, in taking stock on progress, there are some positive signs. Following a second reading on SDS, Parties seemed buoyed by the fact that only a few paragraphs remain open in the draft decision. Similarly, one participant observed that the disagreements in discussions on rangelands and pastoralists did not appear insurmountable. Even in the CST contact group, broad agreement was reached on negotiating a summary for policymakers for future flagship SPI reports.

Meanwhile, talks on resource mobilization and collaboration with the GEF are slow, but they are progressing. There is a palpable sense of acceleration as countries stress that there is “limited time remaining.” We may also see a domino effect of resolutions across agenda items once certain sticking points, like whether to “note” or “recall” past decisions, are resolved. It remains to be seen, however, if the momentum is strong enough to overcome major disagreements like the ones still remaining on drought.