

Your Excellency Minister of Environment of Panama
Your Excellency Madam Executive Secretary
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor to address you on behalf of the Government of Mongolia and We sincerely thank the Government and people of Panama for their warm hospitality and excellent arrangements that allow this session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention.

We also extend our congratulations to You, Madam Executive Secretary for your appointment and also wish to gratitude to the Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification for the dedication and professionalism that continue to guide Parties in advancing the objectives of our Convention.

Excellencies,

CRIC23 convenes at a moment when land degradation, drought, and water scarcity are intensifying across regions, affecting ecosystems and communities in every part of the world. From expanding drought cycles to rapid soil erosion, from declining groundwater to the growing vulnerability of rural households, the global landscape shows how essential our work under this Convention has become.

Healthy land is fundamental not only for food security, but for economic stability, social cohesion, and peace. In many dryland regions, it is the foundation of entire cultures and ways of life. The discussions of this Committee therefore carry great weight, as they shape the technical and practical pathways that Parties rely on to address these shared challenges.

In this broader context, Mongolia will host the next Conference of the Parties in Ulaanbaatar in 2026 and will assume the Presidency. We approach this responsibility with deep respect for the role of the Presidency as a servant of all Parties, and with a clear understanding that COP17 must be shaped not by the views of a single country, but by the voices, expectations, and priorities expressed across all regions.

One of the strongest messages we have heard relates to the importance of rangelands and pastoralist systems. Rangelands make up more than half of the world's land surface and support hundreds of millions of people—herders, Indigenous Peoples, women farmers, youth cooperatives, and rural communities. They supply food, culture, biodiversity, and identity. Yet despite their global significance, rangelands remain among the least understood ecosystems and often receive less policy attention and investment than forests or croplands. As a country where rangelands shape our culture, economy, and environment, Mongolia recognizes the importance of elevating this issue.

A second theme that resonates across regions is the urgent need to better integrate land and water management. In drylands, land degradation and water scarcity are inseparable. When soil health declines, water is lost more quickly; when water is scarce, degraded land struggles to recover. Climate change intensifies both challenges, leading to deeper droughts, more sudden floods, and more unpredictable rainfall.

A third issue raised frequently in consultations is the need to scale up nature-based solutions in infrastructure planning. Countries are investing heavily in transport networks, energy systems, urban development, and other infrastructure that will shape societies for decades to come. At the same time, droughts, land degradation, and extreme climate events are becoming more severe. Restoring natural buffers, protecting vegetation cover, and integrating hybrid green-grey solutions can reduce long-term costs, strengthen resilience, and protect communities. Several countries and financial institutions have shown strong interest in sharing experience in this area, and we believe this can become an important avenue for cooperation.

Mongolia reaffirms its steadfast commitment to the global discourse on drought. We are confident that, under the able leadership of the COP16 Presidency and with the constructive engagement and support of all Parties, the international community will be well-positioned to reach consensus on the most appropriate and collectively endorsed solutions for adoption at COP17.

Colleagues,

CRIC23 is therefore a crucial moment for us. Your discussions on reporting, monitoring, financing, early-warning systems, and capacity needs will guide the technical, political, and practical work that lies ahead. Mongolia is here to listen carefully, learn from your insights, and ensure that COP17 is shaped by the priorities expressed in this room.

Looking ahead, our goal as the incoming Presidency is to help deliver a COP that is inclusive, balanced, scientifically informed, and oriented toward practical solutions. A COP that reflects regional diversity, strengthens cooperation across sectors, brings together governments, scientists, youth, women, Indigenous Peoples, communities, and partners, and advances tangible progress toward land degradation neutrality and drought resilience.

In closing, Mongolia once again extends its deep appreciation to the Government of Panama for hosting CRIC23 with such professionalism and generosity, and to the Secretariat for its tireless work in supporting Parties. We look forward to working closely with all of you as we prepare to welcome the international community to Ulaanbaatar in 2026.

I thank you for your attention and wish you a productive and forward-looking CRIC23.