

Opening Ceremony – Opening Statement Monday 1 December 2025

Madam Chair, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

The Cook Islands has the honour to speak on behalf of the 14 Pacific Small Island Developing States.

As this is our first time taking the floor, we extend our sincere appreciation to the Government and people of Panama for their warm hospitality, and we acknowledge the UNCCD Secretariat and partners for their continued commitment to our region. We align our statement with the remarks delivered by Bhutan on behalf of the Asia-Pacific Group. We also support remarks by Grenada, Paraguay, St Lucia and other SIDS to support establishment of a UNCCD SIDS Caucus.

Madam Chair, you reminded us that drought resilience and financial flows must go hand in hand if we are to deliver lasting results. Our host country further emphasised that national action and multilateral cooperation must be inseparable — that our words must translate into action. Pacific SIDS strongly echo these calls.

Across the Blue Pacific, drought is not only a climate concern — it is a reality already reshaping our livelihoods and landscapes. Our islands are defined by limited land area, fragile soils, and highly constrained freshwater systems. When drought intensifies, the impacts cascade across water security, agriculture, food systems, and human health. Pollution, urban pressures, degradation of water catchments, and poor natural water retention amplify these vulnerabilities — threatening both our resilience and our cultural way of life. For us, sustainable land and water management is a matter of human security and survival.

We therefore welcome CRIC23 as a crucial platform to advance integrated drought planning and land degradation neutrality (LDN) — ensuring that no region, and no island community, is left behind.

The Asia-Pacific Group's emphasis on strengthening national reporting systems is essential. Pacific SIDS continue to face major gaps in high-resolution data, spatial planning tools, and technical capacity to make full use of early-warning systems and the PRAIS reporting platform. We commend efforts by the UNCCD to work collaboratively with regional institutions and agencies to close these gaps, and urge for continued strengthened cooperation — to enable countries to monitor ridge-to-reef ecosystem changes, enhance preparedness, and support inclusive decision-making.

Pacific SIDS remain strongly committed to progressing our Voluntary LDN Targets. However, without predictable, simplified, and climate-aligned financing — including resources dedicated to research, technology transfer, and capacity-building — our ambition will continue to outpace our means. Our vulnerability must be reflected in the scale and accessibility of financial and technical support.

We also welcome the focus at this CRIC on strengthening the science-policy interface, land tenure, gender equality, and the inclusion of Indigenous peoples and local communities — who have been custodians of our lands for generations and whose knowledge remains indispensable to resilience.

As Large Ocean States, where what little land we have is sacred, we underscore that every hectare must be protected and restored — sustainably, equitably, and guided by the principles of intergenerational stewardship.

Madam Chair, we stand ready to work constructively with all Parties to deliver an ambitious and action-oriented outcome from CRIC23 — one that strengthens drought resilience, embeds data-driven and traditional knowledge approaches, and unlocks the financial flows needed to safeguard the well-being of our people and the generations who will inherit our islands.

I thank you Madam Chair,