



**IUCN Formal Statement
UNCCD COP17 / 17 August 2026 / Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia**

Mr President, excellencies, colleagues,

The Conference is taking place at a critical moment. In 2026, amid geopolitical tensions, economic uncertainty, and an intensifying El Niño, we must not lose focus on our escalating planetary crisis.

The accelerating decline of nature is now widely recognised, and its severity and impact on land systems is increasingly clear. Yet progress against our shared climate, biodiversity, land, and development goals remains deeply insufficient, and the gap between commitments and delivery continues to widen.

We know that healthy ecosystems make all the difference.

IUCN is committed to supporting Parties and other stakeholders in this effort: investing in conservation, restoration, and community-driven land management to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality and drought resilience in drylands and beyond. Central to this is a sustained transformation towards sustainable and resilient agriculture and food systems, which remain both a major driver of land degradation and one of our greatest opportunities for restoration at scale.

Two years ago in Riyadh, COP16 made considerable progress toward a framework on proactive drought management. We encourage Parties to finalise the process, and to ensure that it captures the interconnectedness between biodiversity loss, soil degradation, freshwater depletion, and climate change.

2026 will see the convening of the three Rio Convention COPs. There has been a great deal of discussion around aligned approaches to implementation. IUCN strongly supports this initiative, and encourages Parties to increase ambition to deepen coordination, and to scale up high-integrity Nature-based Solutions as a coherent approach for national integration and delivery.

2026 is also the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists, placing a spotlight on ecosystems and their stewards that have too often been overlooked, despite their vital role in confronting our planetary crises. We applaud the efforts of the Mongolian Presidency to champion this issue. Let's make COP17 a turning point for pastoralist leadership in sustainable land management and conservation.

Finally, we must not forget that land restoration can only be achieved with the consistent and meaningful participation of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth in decision-making. Nature conservation and human development must go hand in hand.

As 2030 approaches, let us collectively intensify efforts to ensure that this COP delivers concrete outcomes rather than rhetoric, and to put nature and people first.

Thank you, Mr President.