

**Opening Statement from the U.S. Delegation at the 17<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties  
(COP17) to the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD)**

**Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia**

**17 August 2026**

(check against delivery)

- Madam President, thank you.
- I want to start by thanking our Mongolia hosts. I appreciate how difficult and complex an undertaking hosting the COP is. I know you have worked long and hard to prepare for this COP and showcase your remarkable country to the world.
- I also want to thank the CCD Secretariat for all their work preparing for the COP.
- I also want to offer my congratulations to Executive Secretary Yasmine Foaud. Welcome to UNCCD. Your experience as Minister of Environment in Egypt, an affected country like the United States, brings invaluable insights and experience to the role. Your engagement and diplomacy in the lead-up to COP17 have set the table for success.
- The CCD has helped to achieve significant successes over the last 30 years.
- Targeted restoration and land management policies have improved biological productivity on 26% of global land between 1981 and 2021.
- A market has developed for land restoration, with the global market valued at over \$12 billion in 2021.
- The Al Baydha Project in Saudi Arabia, is using regenerative agriculture applied to desert landscapes to restore degraded land through water harvesting, tree planting, and the revival of traditional Bedouin land management practices.
- An African-led initiative has restored 18 million hectares of land across the Sahel since 2007, improving biodiversity, creating jobs, and increasing arable land.
- The international community has shifted from responding to drought with food aid and tents, to building resilience in food systems and land management in advance.
- Today, with new seeds, drip irrigation and digital access to markets, farmers are diversifying into multiple crops, so even if one crop fails, they can continue generating food and income from others.
- Modern technology has changed desert restoration. Satellite imagery and drones allow scientists to monitor land degradation and track restoration progress with high

accuracy. Artificial intelligence can predict optimal planting patterns, while biotechnology offers drought-resistant crop varieties.

- The United States' approach to agriculture is outlined in President Trump's Executive Order "Advancing Regenerative Agriculture and Strengthening American Farm Resilience," which highlights that:
  - "American farmers and ranchers have always prioritized care of their land and innovative conservation farming practices like regenerative agriculture.
  - "These practices strengthen soil health, lower input costs, improve chemical efficiency, improve farm profitability, maintain yields, increase market value, and strengthen rural communities."
  - "The USG will continue to support advances in precision agriculture technologies; regenerative agriculture practices, research, and education; and spur private-sector innovation in farm modernization by reducing red tape and strengthening public-private partnerships."
- The Secretary's decision to send a delegation to Ulaanbaatar demonstrates our trust that under a Mongolian Presidency the CCD can be an institution focused on delivering the mission of its core mandate; but it will take some hard work to get there.
- Our priorities in attending COP17 include:
  - First, to continue the momentum that started with the introduction of the "Sustainable Management of Agricultural Land" decision text.
    - When this text was introduced at COP16, our goal was to open up space for agricultural companies, who had never participated in or attended CCD events before, to be a part of CCD discussions, programs, and knowledge-sharing. As a direct result, there will be a significant representation of ranchers, agriculture and textile industry at COP17.
    - We will support a decision that: 1) calls for complementary accounting systems for agriculture and grazing land across conventions and programs.; 2) urges a collaborative approach to conservation and land management between governments and farmers/ranchers, as practiced in the United States; and 3) encourages parties to create the conditions that will enable private sector innovation to achieve specific outcomes rather than picking winners and losers among certain practices, technologies and standards.

- Second, to launch and implement the "Investment Toolkit," which will help the private sector prioritize areas for investment in land restoration and land management and identify complementary public financing from donors, private financial institutions and governments.
  - And third, to advance a targeted reform agenda within CCD that returns this convention to its core mandate to ensure that it can deliver tangible benefits for the United States and all members as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible.
- As COP President, we urge you to help ensure that CCD is run in an efficient manner with strong financial oversight while combating land degradation, increasing resilience to drought, and decreasing desertification.
- With that in mind, the Trump Administration has made clear that the United States will no longer support work that does not benefit the American taxpayer.
- The United States believes that too many items on the agenda for the 17th Conference of the Parties (COP17) fall outside of the core mandate of CCD, distracting parties from the important core work combating land degradation, increasing drought resilience, and decreasing desertification.
- To reshape the Convention to return to its core mandate, the U.S. delegation will take a hard line against efforts to expand or dilute the work of the Secretariat or the Committees, such as those that conflate or request synergies between CCD and separate bodies, and we will oppose efforts on climate change, that mandate expansion, or elements that give preference to any particular group on the bases of sex, age, or situation.
- We will work to find consensus on outcomes for this meeting wherever possible, but will block consensus when we must.
- This is not only a question of mandate, but of resources, as deliberation on these issues takes up valuable time without a direct benefit to improving the implementation of the Convention.
- We hope that you, as COP President, and the CCD Secretariat will join us in this approach to streamline operations, return the focus to core work, and strengthen the effectiveness and long-term viability of CCD.
- To ensure full transparency at the outset, the United States would like to share the following positions we will be taking at COP17:
- The United States disagrees with the fundamental premise of the three decisions which we requested be removed from the agenda:

1. First, for the "*Participation and Involvement of Civil Society Organizations in Meetings and Processes of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.*"
  - This decision is unnecessary and a major distraction from efforts of the CCD to advance goals of the Convention. We need to refocus the time and attention of this body, the expense incurred in holding our meetings, and focus the time and resources of the Secretariat on substantive issues under our consideration.
  - The Convention and the Secretariat should focus their resources and funds first and foremost on the parties to the Convention.
2. Second, for the "*Promotion and Strengthening of Relationships with Other Relevant Conventions and International Organizations, Institutions and Agencies*" Decision.
  - The UNFCCC, Paris, and other climate agreements put the United States at an economic disadvantage, harm U.S. citizens by increasing costs, and steered American taxpayer dollars to countries that do not require, or merit, financial assistance.
  - The United States is not a party to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) nor have we endorsed the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.
  - The Administration seeks a balanced approach to economic growth, energy security, and environmental protection – one that promotes American jobs, economic prosperity, and energy security.
  - This proposed decision is entirely unnecessary for the CCD to do its work, and directly contradicts U.S. positions
3. The "*Follow-up on Policy Frameworks and Thematic Issues: Gender*" Decision.
  - The very premise of this draft decision runs against U.S. redlines.
  - The U.S. calls for terminology that clearly refers to women and men, avoiding ambiguous terms like "gender" that introduce ideological concepts obscuring biological reality.
  - We oppose efforts that give preference to any particular group on the basis of sex.

- The United States strongly opposes the inclusion of language referencing gender ideology, as we believe it is detrimental to the well-being of women and girls; further, the Gender Action Plan and the Gender Caucus exceed the core mandate of UNCCD.
  - The United States strongly supports the protection of women and girls, the defense of their rights, and their empowerment.
  - The work described in the proposed decisions is not within the core mandate of UNCCD and contradicts U.S. redline positions.
- We will also need to ensure that our redlines that take the Convention away from its focus on its core work are not included in other decisions, so that we are not forced to block consensus on additional decisions:
  - Use of the term "climate change," "climate action," or "climate agenda" or references to the UNFCCC, Paris Agreement, or more broadly to the SDGs.
  - Use of the term "gender," "gender equality," or references to "gender-responsive," the "Gender Action Plan," or the "Gender Caucus."
  - Use of the terms "Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities," "Indigenous Knowledge" and/or "Indigenous Traditional Knowledge."
- We will also be zealous participants in negotiations on drought and the budget.
- As we have repeatedly made clear since 2019, when the idea was first raised, we will block the adoption of any drought decision that includes language to start negotiation or a study on any new drought governance instrument, creates a new funding mechanism, or creates a new intergovernmental working group to "study the issue of drought governance" for a third time. We are not alone in this and have heard the same concerns from a number of delegations over the years.
- We remain disappointed that, while our redlines are well known, the Africa Group has yet to propose an alternative Drought decision that respects the redlines of many parties.
- We will also push to ensure that the CCD adopts a lower-than-zero-nominal-growth (ZNG) budget that puts the CCD and the Secretariat on a more secure financial footing, only provides support to activities that address the core mandate of the convention, and ensures maximum cost-effectiveness.
- Parties are here to ensure UNCCD delivers the mission of its core mandate and the United States takes that role very seriously. We want to find a successful conclusion and recognize that the Presidency's role will be challenging at times.

- However, if the COP support the above positions, the CCD and its Secretariat will be well positioned and financially stable to advance its core mission – decreasing desertification, combating land degradation, and increasing resilience to drought – now and for years to come. I urge that we all focus specifically on promoting these goals and leave the many extraneous and polarizing issues to the side.
- We look forward to your steady and able diplomatic leadership over the next two weeks.