




UNCCD
COP16
Riyadh | 2024

Our Land. Our Future.

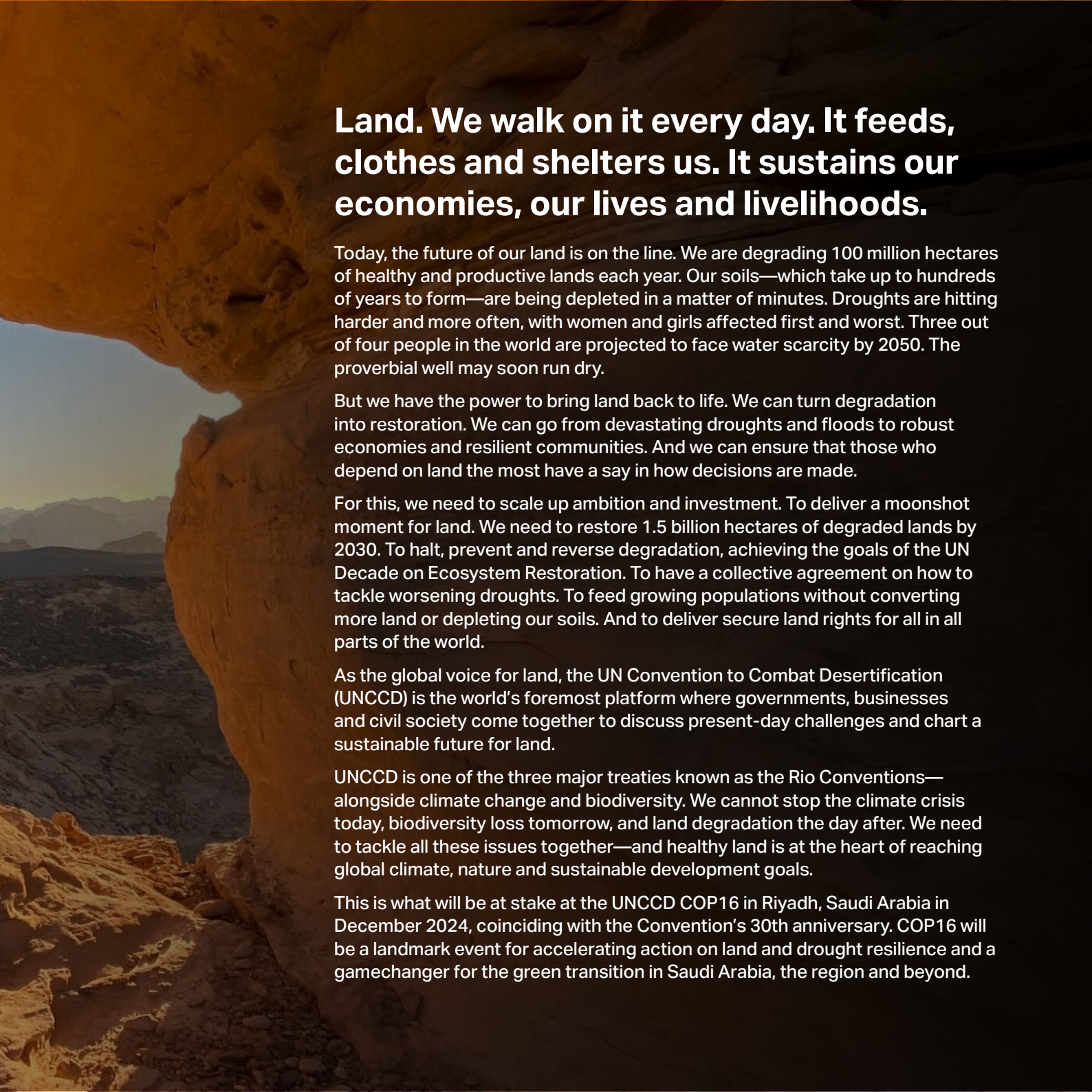
16th meeting of the Conference
of the Parties to the Convention
to Combat Desertification
(UNCCD COP16)

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 2-13 December 2024



**We depend
on land for
our survival.
Yet, we treat
it like dirt."**

United Nations Secretary-General
António Guterres



Land. We walk on it every day. It feeds, clothes and shelters us. It sustains our economies, our lives and livelihoods.

Today, the future of our land is on the line. We are degrading 100 million hectares of healthy and productive lands each year. Our soils—which take up to hundreds of years to form—are being depleted in a matter of minutes. Droughts are hitting harder and more often, with women and girls affected first and worst. Three out of four people in the world are projected to face water scarcity by 2050. The proverbial well may soon run dry.

But we have the power to bring land back to life. We can turn degradation into restoration. We can go from devastating droughts and floods to robust economies and resilient communities. And we can ensure that those who depend on land the most have a say in how decisions are made.

For this, we need to scale up ambition and investment. To deliver a moonshot moment for land. We need to restore 1.5 billion hectares of degraded lands by 2030. To halt, prevent and reverse degradation, achieving the goals of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. To have a collective agreement on how to tackle worsening droughts. To feed growing populations without converting more land or depleting our soils. And to deliver secure land rights for all in all parts of the world.

As the global voice for land, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is the world's foremost platform where governments, businesses and civil society come together to discuss present-day challenges and chart a sustainable future for land.

UNCCD is one of the three major treaties known as the Rio Conventions—alongside climate change and biodiversity. We cannot stop the climate crisis today, biodiversity loss tomorrow, and land degradation the day after. We need to tackle all these issues together—and healthy land is at the heart of reaching global climate, nature and sustainable development goals.

This is what will be at stake at the UNCCD COP16 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in December 2024, coinciding with the Convention's 30th anniversary. COP16 will be a landmark event for accelerating action on land and drought resilience and a gamechanger for the green transition in Saudi Arabia, the region and beyond.

What is COP16 and why does it matter?

- The Conference of the Parties (COP) was established by the Convention as its main decision-making body. It is made up of UNCCD's 197 Parties (196 countries and the European Union) and is responsible for guiding the Convention so that it can respond to global challenges and national needs.
- UNCCD COP16 will be a landmark event to raise global ambition and accelerate action on land and drought resilience through a people-centred approach. It will coincide with the Convention's 30th anniversary.
- UNCCD COP16 will be the first major UN conference hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It will also be the first time a UNCCD COP is held in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, which knows first-hand the impacts of desertification, land degradation and drought.
- At COP16, countries are expected to decide on collective actions to:
 - accelerate restoration of degraded land between now and 2030,
 - boost drought preparedness, response and resilience,
 - ensure that land continues to provide climate and biodiversity solutions,
 - boost resilience to escalating sand and dust storms,
 - scale up nature-positive food production,
 - strengthen women's land rights to advance land restoration, and
 - promote youth engagement, including decent land-based jobs for youth.
- UNCCD is a people-focused Convention where civil society and indigenous peoples, farmers and scientists, women and youth, local authorities and the private sector can come together in support of sustainable land stewardship.
- COP16 is expected to catalyze new initiatives on land restoration and drought resilience. It is also set to leave a strong legacy, building on the G20 Global Land Initiative, as well as Saudi and Middle East Green Initiatives.



Land restoration is an urgent, worthwhile and achievable goal to address multiple global crises

Now is the time to turn commitments into action

- Up to 40 per cent of the world's land is degraded, affecting half of humanity and with dire consequences for our climate, biodiversity and livelihoods. If current trends continue, restoring 1.5 billion hectares of land by 2030 will be necessary to achieve a land-degradation-neutral world.
- Between 2015 and 2019, at least 100 million hectares of healthy and productive land were degraded every year—adding up to twice the size of Greenland.
- Global voluntary commitments to restore degraded land have reached one billion hectares by 2030. Almost half of these are pledged under the UNCCD. Through the Global Land Initiative, the Group of Twenty (G20) members have pledged to halve land degradation by 2040.
- Breathing life back into land yields multiple benefits for people and nature. Every dollar invested in restoring degraded lands brings between \$7-30 in economic returns. Policy and economic incentives are urgently needed to unlock a trillion-dollar restoration economy.
- At COP16, governments, businesses and civil society are expected to scale up and speed up land restoration in all parts of the world as a cost-effective solution to reach sustainable development goals.





Drought resilience:

No region is immune to drought, but all countries can prepare to better withstand its impacts.

- Droughts are hitting more often and harder all over the world –up by 29 per cent since 2000 – driven or amplified by climate change but also the way we manage our land. Sustainable land management is the key to building resilience to drought.
- Building resilience for both women and men is essential to reduce the high human, social and economic costs of drought—from impacts on food, water and energy security to displacement and conflict.
- Investing in drought resilience is one of the most cost-effective actions countries and regions can take, with returns of up to 10 times the initial investment.
- The International Drought Resilience Alliance (IDRA) is a coalition of 36 countries and 28 international organizations that aims to change how the world tackles the growing drought risks. COP16 will be an opportunity to further expand and strengthen IDRA.
- At COP16, countries are set to come together to reach a collective agreement on how to tackle worsening droughts in an inclusive way, so that the communities most affected can contribute their ingenuity, and to catalyze new investments in drought resilience.

Land is at the heart of the sustainable development agenda

- Healthy land can accelerate the achievement of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Optimizing how land is used and managed across the landscape can contribute to climate and biodiversity targets, close the food gap, and promote human health and wellbeing.
- A growing world population drives growing demand for natural resources. By 2050, 10 billion people will share our one planet – depending on healthy land for their livelihoods.
- Food systems are the single biggest driver of land conversion, deforestation, and biodiversity loss. Scaling up nature-positive production is necessary to feed the world and protect the planet. We don't need to convert more land if we manage the land already in use better and rehabilitate degraded land.
- The world's land is a vital line of defense against climate change, contributing up to 30 per cent of mitigation efforts to keep global temperature increase below 1.5°C threshold by 2050.
- Land degradation is not just an environmental problem. It increases the risk of declining human health and the spread of new diseases. It is also the driver of forced migration and conflicts over scarce resources.
- At COP16, countries will come together to accelerate efforts to sustainably manage and restore land as a key driver of economic growth, prosperity and wellbeing, and to advance the SDGs.





A people-centered approach:

Greater equity and secure land rights are urgently needed to protect and restore our rapidly degrading land.

- Drought, land degradation and desertification – all of which are becoming more frequent – are impacting women and girls first and worst. Local communities, indigenous peoples and vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, are often disproportionately affected.
- Women produce half the world's food yet own less than one-fifth of all land and make up 70 per cent of the world's hungry. Governments must eliminate legal barriers to women and girls' land ownership, ensure women can inherit land, and better involve women in land management, conservation, and restoration.
- One billion young people live in developing countries, regions directly dependent on land and natural resources for sustenance. Global land restoration commitments can only be achieved with the involvement of youth who have the power to transform their communities.
- As humanity is becoming increasingly urban, the vital connection to land is weakening. For many young people, living from and working on land is no longer an attractive option. Unlocking decent land-based jobs and business opportunities for youth is an investment in future land stewardship.
- Often economically disadvantaged, indigenous peoples and local communities are amongst the richest when accounting for their natural capital. Areas managed by local communities are characterized by lower rates of deforestation and land degradation. It is crucial to preserve traditional and local knowledge and recognize its key role in land restoration.
- At COP16, countries will come together to consolidate commitments and actions to secure land rights, promote social and intergenerational equity and ensure that those who depend on land the most are an integral part of decision-making.

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United Nations
Convention to Combat
Desertification

United for land