

UNCCD COP 16 Informal Guide

 **02-13** DEC
2024

 COP16, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia



United Nations
Convention to Combat
Desertification



UNCCD
COP16
Riyadh | 2024



Sixteenth session of the UNCCD Conference of the Parties
2-13 December 2024, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

30 November-1 December	Regional consultations
30 November	CRIC and CST Bureau meetings
1 December	COP Bureau meeting
2-3 December	High level segment: Ministerial dialogues
2-13 December	Conference of the Parties - COP
3-4 and 9-11 December	Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention - CRIC
3, 5-6 and 11-12 December	Committee on Science and Technology - CST
2-13 December	Action Agenda; Thematic Days
2-13 December	Special events, side events and exhibition area

This informal guide was prepared by the UNCCD secretariat with the purpose of assisting participants to the meetings in Riyadh in making the sessions a success. This guide seeks to provide an overview of the structure, programme and agenda items of COP 16, CST 16 and CRIC 22, and practical information on how the work is carried out at the formal and informal settings. This guide is not meant to offer substantive proposals on the decisions to be made at the COP, but to support effective organization of work and focused discussions during the sessions.

The secretariat would like to emphasize that this is an informal guide and should not be referred to as an official document.





Introduction

The sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties - COP 16 - of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) will be held in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, from 2 to 13 December 2024. This conference will be different from all earlier COPs. It has an ambitious negotiation set-up, topics ranging from a global framework for addressing drought to enhancing women's land rights and safeguarding rangelands. For the first time under the UNCCD, the COP will also have a massive Action Agenda that is built around seven Thematic Days, consisting of events, performances and meetings organized by a wide variety of stakeholders.

The conference site itself is extensive. It will consist of two main areas:

- 1. The Blue Zone**, which has the formal meeting rooms, offices of the UNCCD staff and the conference team, meeting rooms for the regional and interest groups, and pavilions for Parties and major organizations. All high-level meetings and events, the negotiations, and regional group meetings will take place within the Blue Zone. Its access is restricted to country delegates, observers and accredited civil society organizations and private sector entities, which are formally registered to the COP through the Indico system. The Blue Zone is guarded by the United Nations Security and Safety Services, working in collaboration with the host country security services.
- 2. The Green Zone**, which consists of several event arenas, an exhibition area, and numerous large and small pavilions and meeting spaces. The Green Zone is meant for the a wide variety of happenings, exhibitions, and meetings that are linked with the COP topics and can be accessed also by the general public. It has its own form of registration, while participants registered to the Blue Zone may access the Green Zone as well. The host country is in charge of the Green Zone arrangements.

During the period of the COP, some major events other than those of the UNCCD will be organized in Riyadh, most notably the One Water Summit. Although some COP participants will attend also those events, the UNCCD secretariat is not involved in their arrangements and cannot advice on related questions. Those events are not covered in this informal guide.





1. COP 16 opening and the high-level segment

The formal opening of the COP will take place during the morning session of Monday 2 December. It will be a festive, ceremonial event with high-level representation. After the opening, the COP will continue with the high level segment and parallel plenary sessions.

The high-level segment of 2-3 December consists of three ministerial dialogues:

- a) **Monday 2 December, 3-6pm:** From Geneva to Riyadh and beyond. Enhancing global and national policy instruments for proactive drought management
- b) **Tuesday 3 December, 10am-12pm:** Unlocking public and private finance for land restoration and drought resilience
- c) **Tuesday 3 December, 2-5pm:** Impacts of land degradation and drought on forced migration, security and prosperity

The Ministerial Dialogues are open to all delegations accredited to the Blue Zone of the conference venue, as well as to observer organizations and institutions. They are formal COP meetings and will have interpretation in all six official languages of the UN.

The first and the third dialogue will be facilitated by Ministers representing different regional groups. These facilitators will invite icebreakers or keynote speakers to trigger discussion, and they will also guide the deliberations and ensure efficient use of time. During the dialogues ministers, heads of delegation, and heads of observer entity will be encouraged to engage directly.

The second dialogue will be made up of two panels, first of which will consider The Business Case for Land and the second one is titled Delivering a moonshot moment for land, with focus on mobilizing finance for addressing land degradation and drought resilience. A speakers list will be opened during the panel presentations, and ministers and other heads of delegation will be encouraged to engage directly in response to the panel presentations.

In addition to the ministerial dialogues, ministers, heads of delegation and other high-level representatives will have the opportunity to make formal statements in a separate room. Registration for a slot to make a formal statement will be opened in session and further information will be provided in the Daily Journal.

Several other high-level Special Events will be organized during the COP. Some of these events derive from earlier COP deliberations although they are not part of the formal agenda, and their outcomes will be noted in the COP proceedings.

A list and schedule of all high-level and other Special Events is provided in the annex.





2. Overview of the negotiations

COP 16 will have a multitude of important decisions to make on the following topics, among others:

- **Launching the global drought agenda:** The Intergovernmental Working Group on Drought will submit its report for the consideration of COP 16, with options ranging from the adoption of a new policy instrument on drought to approaches for drought finance, in addition to consideration of various technical tools, inter-agency collaboration and science-policy guidance;
- **Committing to large-scale protection and restoration of land** will involve decisions on the next steps in advancing land degradation neutrality, building multi-country flagship projects, and approaches for engaging the private sector in protecting and restoring land, among others;
- **The financial needs assessment will be completed by the time of the COP.** It will provide the basis for a structured consideration of the needs and how to address them under the Convention.
- **Reviewing the UNCCD strategic focus:** COP 16 will consider the results and recommendations of the midterm evaluation of the 2018-2030 UNCCD Strategic Framework, which include the launching of consideration of the post-2030 UNCCD targets/strategy, recognition of the globality of desertification, land degradation and drought, and consideration of key factors for effective future implementation, among other topics;
- **Renewing the UNCCD science-policy guidance:** The CST Bureau is presenting a proposal to revise the Science-Policy Interface, which seeks to enhance the scientific basis for the UNCCD implementation in the coming years;
- **Launching the UNCCD Youth Engagement Strategy;**
- **Launching new UNCCD policy areas on (1) grasslands and rangelands and (2) ecologically sustainable agri-food systems;**
- **Further confirmation of UNCCD lead role in policies for advancing women's land rights and the development of improved gender-responsive indicators; and**
- **Emerging global collaboration and guidance for sand and dust storms source mitigation.**

The COP will also consider several housekeeping matters and standard agenda items, such as the programme and budget for the secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM), the updated communication plan, and interaction with the civil society organizations.

Although the two-week meeting is generally called "COP 16", in reality it consists of sessions of the COP and its two subsidiary bodies: the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) and the Committee on Science and Technology (CST). The COP itself takes different forms: it convenes as a high-level segment and a civil society dialogue platform in addition to the usual plenary sessions, and it also establishes a Committee of the Whole (COW) as a procedurally more suitable body for negotiations on its agenda items.

As mentioned earlier, the COP will start with a ceremonial opening, which will also include opening statements by a small number of high-level representatives as well as regional and interest groups. This is likely to take all of the morning meeting of Monday 2 December. In order to become properly organized, the COP plenary will meet also in that afternoon. Then the COP will adopt its agenda and organization of work, elect most of the Bureau members (for details, please see chapter 3.3) and establish the COW.

The COP plenary closes after completing these first procedural tasks and immediately after, still on Monday afternoon, a chair for the COW gets appointed, and the COW starts working. It will have just a few items on its agenda in the first session: the UNCCD programme and budget, and drought matters (consideration of the policy framework on drought and the results of the related intergovernmental working group). Starting these items early is meant to provide them with plenty of time for negotiations at the contact group level.

On the following day, Tuesday 3 December, the CRIC and the CST open their first meetings in parallel to the second and third Ministerial Dialogues. While the CRIC and the CST work, the COW will not. During the remaining days of the first week, the COW, CRIC and CST will each have some sessions, so that their agenda items can go through the plenary introduction and the consideration of related draft decisions may start at the level of the contact groups. All three will continue also during the second week, COP plenaries will then take place to approve the decisions resulting from the CRIC and CST contact groups, and eventually also those of the two COW contact groups. The planned schedules of each body are presented in the last pages of their agenda documents.

The key topics of COP 16 are negotiated under different UNCCD bodies, depending on their nature. Below is an overview of the main agenda items of the COP and the two subsidiary bodies.

COP/COW		
CST		CRIC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPI review • SPI report on sustainable land use systems • SPI report on aridity trends and related approaches • SPI: Cooperation activities • Science-policy knowledge management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Drought ○ Gender ○ Land tenure ○ Sand and dust storms ○ Migration, security and urban-rural linkages ○ Grasslands and rangelands ○ Agri-food systems • Results of the midterm evaluation • UNCCD communication plan • Relationships and synergies • 2025-2026 UNCCD budget • Civil society participation • Private sector engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results of 2023 national reporting (report of CRIC 21) • Next steps in promoting LDN • Resource mobilization • Collaboration with the GEF • Promotion of capacity building • 2025 - 2028 workplan of the secretariat and the GM



3. Procedures and organization of the negotiations

This section provides information of how the formal negotiation sessions are organized and what is expected from the delegates, with the main aim of supporting those that are new to the UNCCD process to successfully navigate through the COP.

3.1. Organization of work at the plenaries

The plenary debates of each body – COW, CRIC and CST – advance in a similar manner:

- The chair states the agenda item that is about to be considered and asks the secretariat (or sometimes someone else, for example a working group chair) to present the item.
- The secretariat makes an introduction, which usually is a short summary of the document that has been prepared for the agenda item.
- The chair opens the floor for discussion.
- For most items, each regional/interest group makes a statement presenting its views concerning the agenda item. The groups are usually relatively well organized and assign specific delegates to speak on behalf of the group on different items.
- After the regional/interest groups, individual countries and finally observers may also take the floor.
- For many items, the plenary debate is short, consisting only of regional statements. However, there are always also items on which many individual countries also want to state their views at the plenary level.
- When there are no more comments from the floor, or when the time allocated for an item runs out, the Chair closes the item. After that, it will be subject to negotiations in a contact group unless something is agreed immediately at the plenary.

The bodies meet in the plenary form for (1) the introduction/first debate of each item and (2) after the negotiations on an item are completed, to agree on a finalized decision text. Negotiations are done in contact groups, and before an item can be taken to a contact group, it has to be presented at the plenary. Often the plenary advances fast, as countries want to start the negotiations on each decision text. It is also common to start at the plenary with those items that are the most difficult to agree on – for example, as mentioned earlier, budget tends to be the first item to be introduced at the COW so that the budget contact group can start immediately.





3.2. Contact group work

Usually four contact groups are established: one for the COW on the budget, one for other COW other matters, one for the CST and one for the CRIC matters. To enable also small delegations to fully participate in the negotiations, the general approach is to allow only two contact groups to meet in parallel, although sometimes there are exceptions to this approach.

Each contact group is open to any Party that wants to join the negotiations, but in practice regional/interest groups nominate their representatives to speak on behalf of the group. The size of the groups varies: the budget group tends to be an “expert-only” small group, with approx. 10-12 negotiators, while other negotiations attract bigger crowds. Contact groups may decide to establish smaller sub-groups for specific items. As the UNCCD is a party-driven process, the size and composition of the contact groups is a prerogative of the Parties. A facilitator or two co-facilitators are selected to each contact group, and they are always national delegates.

The draft decisions prepared by the secretariat are the starting point for contact group negotiations. The usual order of negotiations for one decision in the contact group is as follows:

- The facilitator calls for general comments to the draft decision.
- The draft is amended to include the comments, and as different groups may present differing comments, some parts of the draft decision may end up with several alternative approaches.
- The facilitator opens the first reading. The draft decision text is read through paragraph by paragraph, and the negotiators either agree with the content or give their proposed modifications to it. After the first reading, some paragraphs have been agreed by everyone, some have a few small details to be further considered, and some others contain two or more alternative texts. Everything that has been agreed may not be re-opened for negotiation again. The text sections that have not been agreed are placed in square brackets.
- The facilitator opens the second, third, fourth... reading and the text is cleaned up and modified until all of it is agreed.

Between the different readings, there is usually a break so that each regional/interest group may consult internally on its views. When a draft decision is fully agreed in a contact group, it goes back to the plenary of the body that has started it (COW, CRIC or CST) for formal adoption. It is assumed that a text that is agreed at the level of the contact group is acceptable to all Parties and thus ready for adoption.





While COW, CRIC and CST plenary may agree on a draft decision completed at a contact group, they do not have the powers to make decisions. Only the COP plenary can do that. Formally speaking, CRIC and CST make only “recommendations” to the COP. Thus draft decisions that are agreed at the level of CRIC or CST plenary are not yet complete, but they must be sent also to the COP plenary for adoption. For most decisions, this is a quick proceeding. If, however, a decision that is agreed at a contact group level is opened at the plenary, there are two possibilities: if the change that is requested to the agreed form is small but important, for example correcting a typo, it can be immediately agreed upon during the plenary. If it is such that many groups and countries would further discuss about it, the draft decision is usually sent back to the contact group, as the plenary is not meant for detailed negotiations.

3.3. Role of the Bureaus of the COP, CRIC and CST

The three Bureaus are formally in charge of overseeing the organization of sessions and of any procedural issues. The COP Bureau has nine Vice-Presidents and a President elected in a manner that every geographical region shall be represented by at least two members). An official representing the host country is usually elected by acclamation at the COP Opening as the President, thus for COP 16 the president will be an official representative of Saudi Arabia. CRIC and CST Bureaus have five members each including the chair (one per region). The COP Bureau is elected at the beginning of the COP, -while the Vice-Chairs of the CRIC and CST Bureaus-are elected at the end of the respective subsidiary body session. The CST and CRIC Chairpersons are elected at the last COP Plenary meeting (as decided by decision 25/COP.10 and decision 13/COP.13) . During their sessions, the respective Bureaus meet daily.

3.4. Role of the secretariat and the GM

The secretariat is the ‘machinery’ supporting the COP and its subsidiary bodies. It advises the Bureaus in their work, and is in charge of the documentation (both content and delivery), agenda, organization of work, planning of facilities with the host country, arranging sponsored participants’ travel etc. During the sessions and the contact groups, the secretariat supports the chairs and facilitators on both substantive and procedural matters.

The secretariat relies on UN secretariat expertise to support specific aspects of the conference. Document experts run the document reproduction and dissemination and the arrangement of in-session edits/translations, while UN security leads the security measures. Some of these services are provided remotely – for example, the completed draft decisions are often sent to UN Geneva for editing, and due to time difference in some COP venues, this may occasionally complicate the schedules.

The GM is not involved in the COP arrangements, but it submits its report to the COP and is involved in many other agenda items too. For these agenda items, the GM is present in the negotiations and provides information as needed, but it is not expected to support the chair procedurally, only advice on content issues.



4. Action Agenda and Thematic Days

The Action Agenda highlights voluntary commitments and actions on land, resilience and people across the thematic days during COP16. It consists of numerous events that take place throughout the days, in parallel to the meetings of the COP and its subsidiary bodies, and that are organized in both the Blue and the Green Zone. The main purpose of the Action Agenda is to generate commitments and cooperation that transfer the UNCCD objectives and priorities into concrete action. It includes high-level dialogues and roundtables, forums targeting specific stakeholders, thematic or region-specific events, and many others, which will often result in announcements of cooperation initiatives and support structures.

The Action Agenda is built around six Thematic Days and in addition, the second day of the high-level segment has emphasis on action on finance. Each Thematic Day is overseen, and to a large part organized, by lead organizations other than the UNCCD. Below is a brief overview of each Thematic Day and also the second day of the high-level segment, with information of the nature and focus of the events to be organised. It should be noted that the UNCCD secretariat does not have full information of everything that will take place each day, and the below lists are only to provide examples of the events that will be organised.

❑ 3 December: High-level segment / Action Agenda focus on finance

Many events during this day consider innovative financing tools that attract new sources of funding for land management and restoration. Another focus area is the scale of financing required for LDN and drought resilience emphasizing the need for public-private collaboration to drive impactful investments.

Events include the following:

- COP Ministerial Dialogue on unlocking public and private finance for land restoration and drought resilience
- Launching of three reports on finance gaps and opportunities: the UNCCD Financial Needs Assessment, the Economics of Drought Report, and the Sustainable financing modalities for Drylands Report
- Numerous events around finance organized by the Islamic Development Bank, the Saudi Environment Fund, the African Development Bank, the OPEC Fund, UNDP, Germany and Italy, among others.



❑ 4 December: Land Day

Land Day will focus on the importance of healthy land for combating climate change, creating jobs and alleviating poverty, with an emphasis on nature-based solutions, land restoration and private sector engagement.

Events include the following, among others:

- High-level Interactive Dialogue: Gender Caucus
- Business 4 Land Forum
- International Symposium on nature-based solutions
- Middle East Greening Initiative event
- Fashion 4 Land

❑ 5 December: Agri-Food Systems Day

Agri-Food Systems Day will highlight sustainable farming practices for resilient crops and healthy soils while protecting ecosystems.

Events include the following, among others:

- High-level interactive dialogue on agri-food systems
- Arab Bank for Development in Africa (BADEA) flagship project announcement
- World Soil Day celebration
- Numerous events around sustainable agriculture and value chains, rangelands and grasslands, and food security, among others

❑ 6 December: Governance Day

Governance Day will address inclusive land governance.

Events include the following:

- Mayors' Forum
- Numerous events around secure tenure, women's land rights, urban-rural linkages and integrated land use planning, among others.





❑ 7 December: People's Day

People's Day will focus on the role of youth, women and civil society in decision-making.

Events include the following:

- High-level event: Indigenous Peoples for Land
- Youth Forum Action for Land
- Gender Caucus: technical sessions on gender responsive indicators and on women-led solutions for drought resilience
- Numerous events around the role of women, youth, indigenous peoples and faith leaders in protecting land, the development of gender responsive indicators, and rangelands/mobile pastoralism, among others.

❑ 9 December: Science, Technology and Innovation Day

Science, Technology and Innovation Day aims to accelerate scientific solutions for land health.

Events include the following:

- High-level interactive dialogue on the role of science and Earth Intelligence
- High-level dialogue on research in combating desertification and land degradation
- Science-Policy Interface Day
- Numerous events around data collection, monitoring and reporting on land, droughts and sand and dust storms, sustainable agricultural innovations and technologies for LDN, and research collaboration, among others

❑ 10 December: Resilience Day

Resilience Day will center on policies and technologies to build societal and planetary resilience in the face of climate change.

Events include the following:

- Launching of the Global Drought Atlas
- Numerous events around drought preparedness, early warning systems, landscape restoration, innovations in water management, and knowledge sharing, among others.





5. How to stay informed during the COP

During the COP, the scheduling of meetings, negotiations and events evolves all the time, and it is important to find the latest and correct information fast. Since COP 14, the UNCCD has had a **Conference App** that provides access to all official documents and other relevant information, and also provides up-to-date schedules and room allocations. This App is available for free for different phone operating systems.

At the beginning of each COP day, the Daily Journal is the key source of information. It is produced by the UNCCD conference services and present the planned schedule and programme for the day, including the timing and venue of plenary meetings, contact groups, special events and side events, as well as regional and interest group meetings. The Journal also presents the programme that was concluded in the previous day. The Journal will be published on the App and the UNCCD website for each day of the COP. The schedule of meetings will also be available on screens in the different hallways of the conference center, guiding participants where to go.

For substantive progress, the Earth Negotiations Bulletin (ENB) online daily reports provide a detailed description of what was negotiated, who proposed what and what's next. It can be accessed on: <https://enb.iisd.org/negotiations/un-convention-combat-desertification-unccd>



Annex: List of all UNCCD high-level and special events

The Ministerial Dialogues of the High-level Segment of the Conference of the Parties which will take place on December 2 and December 3. The topics for consideration for the ministerial dialogues are as follows:

- **Ministerial Dialogue:** From Geneva to Riyadh and beyond. Enhancing global and national policy instruments for proactive drought management December 2, 2024; 15:00-18:00.
- **Ministerial Dialogue:** Unlocking public and private finance for Land Restoration and Drought Resilience, December 3, 2024; 10:00-13:00.
- **Ministerial Dialogue:** Impacts of land degradation and drought on forced migration, security and prosperity, 3 December 2024; 15:00-18:00.

Other special events and high-level interactive dialogues, aligned with the thematic days of the Action Agenda:

- **High Level Interactive Dialogue of the Gender Caucus:** HerLand: Women's leadership on sustainable land management, 4 December; 10:00-13:00.
- **High-Level Interactive Dialogue:** Enabling environment to catalyze the transformation towards sustainable, resilient and inclusive agri-food systems, December 5, 2024; 13:00-15:00.
- **High-level Interactive Dialogue - Mayors' Forum:** Local Leadership and Innovative Governance for Sustainable Land Management, December 6, 2024; 13:00-15:00.
- **Business for Land Forum,** December 4, 2024; 13:00-15:00.
- **Indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCS) Dialogue,** December 7, 2024; 10:00-13:00.
- **Youth Forum,** December 7, 2024; 15:00.- 18:00.
- **Gender Caucus,** December 7, 2024; 15:00-18:00.
- **High-level Interactive Dialogue:** Seeing healthy land as an opportunity: Scaling up science and data to harmonize actions to address the global environmental crises, December 9, 2024; 13:00-15:00

