



Convention to Combat Desertification

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Conference of the Parties

Report of the Conference of the Parties on its sixteenth session, held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, from 2 to 13 December 2024

Part one: proceedings

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I. Opening of the session

A. Opening of the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties

1. On 2 December 2024, the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16) was opened by the COP 15 President H.E. Alain-Richard Donwahi. Pursuant to article 22 of the rules of procedure of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the President of COP 15 made a statement.

B. Election of the President

(Agenda item 1 (a))

2. At its 1st meeting, on 2 December 2024, the COP elected, by acclamation, H.E. Abdulrahman Abdulmohsen Al-Fadley, Minister of Environment, Water and Agriculture of Saudi Arabia, as President of COP 16.

3. The incoming President made a statement.

C. General statements

4. Also at the 1st meeting, welcoming remarks were made by His Royal Highness Prince Faisal bin Abdulaziz bin Mohammed bin Ayyaf Al-Muqrin, Mayor of Riyadh.

5. At the same meeting, welcoming remarks were also made by Ms. Amina Mohamed, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General (via video) and Mr. Ibrahim Thiaw, Executive Secretary of the UNCCD.

6. An opening statement was made by His Excellency Oyun-Erdene Luvsannamsrai, Prime Minister of Mongolia, as host of COP 17.

7. A keynote statement was made by Mr. Johan Rockström, Director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and Professor in Earth System Science at the University of Potsdam.

8. The COP 16 President made an announcement on the Riyadh Drought Resilience Partnership.

9. A statement was made by H.E. Muhammed Al Jasser, President of the Islamic Development Bank, on behalf of the Arab Coordination Group.

10. Also at the 1st meeting, statements were made by the representatives of Morocco (on behalf of the African Group), the European Union, Bhutan (on behalf of the Asia-Pacific Group), Ecuador (on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean Group), Hungary (on behalf of the Regional Implementation Annex for the Northern Mediterranean (Annex IV)) and Azerbaijan (on behalf of Regional Implementation Annex for Central and Eastern Europe (Annex V)).

11. Furthermore, a statement was also made by a representative of civil society.

II. Organizational matters

A. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work, including the sessions of the subsidiary bodies

(Agenda item 1 (b) and (f))

12. The Conference considered agenda item 1 (b) and (f) at its 2nd meeting, on 2 December 2024.

13. Following a statement by the President of COP 16, the Conference adopted its agenda and the organization of work contained in document ICCD/COP(16)/Rev.1, as orally revised for the session, as follows:

1. Organizational matters:
 - (a) Election of the President;
 - (b) Adoption of the agenda;
 - (c) Election of officers other than the President:
 - (i) Election of Vice-Presidents;
 - (ii) Election of the Chair of the Committee on Science and Technology;
 - (iii) Election of the Chair of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention;
 - (d) Credentials of delegations;
 - (e) Accreditation of intergovernmental organizations, civil society organizations and representatives from the private sector, and admission of observers;
 - (f) Organization of work, including the sessions of the subsidiary bodies.
2. 2018–2030 Strategic Framework of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification:
 - (a) Report of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention and its recommendations to the Conference of the Parties;
 - (b) Review of progress in the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification communication plan;
 - (c) Follow-up on the midterm evaluation of the 2018–2030 Strategic Framework of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification;
 - (d) Review of the report of the Committee on Science and Technology and its recommendations to the Conference of the Parties.
3. Promotion and strengthening of relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies.
4. Policy frameworks and thematic issues, including new emerging issues: grassland and rangeland.
5. Special segment:
 - (a) High-level ministerial dialogues:
 - (i) From Geneva to Riyadh and beyond, enhancing global and national policy instruments for a proactive drought management approach;
 - (ii) Unlocking public and private finance for land restoration and drought resilience;
 - (iii) Impacts of land degradation and drought on forced migration, security and prosperity;
 - (b) High-level interactive dialogues:
 - (i) Sustainable, resilient and inclusive agrifood systems;
 - (ii) The role of subnational governments to accelerate sustainable land management;
 - (iii) Science-technology and innovation.

6. Programme and budget:
 - (a) Programme and budget for the biennium 2025–2026;
 - (b) Financial performance for the Convention trust funds;
 - (c) Report of the Evaluation Office.
7. Procedural matters:
 - (a) Participation and involvement of civil society organizations in meetings and processes of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification;
 - (b) Participation and involvement of the private sector in meetings and processes of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the business engagement strategy;
 - (c) Programme of work for the seventeenth session of the Conference of the Parties.
8. Report on the session.

B. Election of officers other than the President

(Agenda item 1 (c))

14. The Conference considered this agenda item at its 2nd meeting, on 2 December 2024, and elected the following officers for its sixteenth session at its 2nd and 9 th mtgs :

Vice-Presidents:

- Mr. Luis Domingos Constantino (Angola)
- Mr. Khalid Cherki (Morocco)
- Ms. Ariuntuya Dorjsuren (Mongolia)
- Mr. Rodrigo Andrade (Chile)
- Mr. Julius Smith (Trinidad and Tobago)
- Ms. Juliane Wiesenhütter (Germany)
- Ms. Stephanie Piers (Switzerland)
- Mr. Toghrul Feyzili (Azerbaijan)

15. The Conference appointed Mr. Khalid Cherki (Morocco) as Rapporteur of the sixteenth session.

Chair of the Committee on Science and Technology

16. At the 9th meeting, on 13 December 2024, the Conference elected Mr. Jeffrey Herrick (United States of America) as Chair of the forthcoming seventeenth session of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST).

Chair of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention

17. At the 9th meeting, on 13 December 2024, the Conference elected Ms. Philippine Dutailly (France) as Chair of the forthcoming twenty-third and twenty-fourth sessions of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC).

C. Credentials of delegations

(Agenda item 1(d))

18. At its 8th meeting, on 13 December, the Conference considered the provisional report on credentials of delegations, as contained in document ICCD/COP(16)/23, and the recommendations contained therein.

19. At its 8th meeting, the Conference adopted a draft decision contained in document ICCD/COP(16)/L.11 approving the final report on credentials.

20. The COP, on the basis of the final report of the COP Bureau and additional credentials provided by Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Cabo Verde, Cook Islands, Dominica, Equatorial Guinea, the Gambia, Haiti, Mauritius, Nicaragua, Somalia, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania and accepted the credentials of Parties attending the session.

D. Accreditation of intergovernmental organizations, civil society organizations and representatives from the private sector, and admission of observers

(Agenda item 1 (e))

21. At the 2nd meeting, on 2 December 2024, the Conference decided to accredit as observers the intergovernmental and civil society organizations and private sector entities, as listed in document ICCD/COP(16)/14.

E. Committee on Science and Technology

22. The sixteenth session of the CST was convened under the chairmanship of Mr. Héctor Manuel Arias Rojo (Mexico), whose appointment was confirmed by the Committee in line with rule 25 of the rules of procedure of the COP. The Committee held five meetings, from 3 to 13 December 2024.

23. At the 1st meeting, on 3 December 2024, the Committee adopted its provisional agenda as contained in document ICCD/COP(16)/CST/1, and approved the organization of work for the session as contained in the annex of the document, as orally amended.

24. Also, at the same meeting, the Committee appointed Ms. Nana Bolashvili (Georgia) as CST Vice-Chair, in replacement of Mr. Hamid Čustović (Bosnia and Herzegovina), and Mr. Ahmed Abdelati Ahmed Ali (Egypt) to serve as Rapporteur of the Committee.

25. Furthermore, at the same meeting, the Committee agreed to establish a contact group and appointed Mr. Joseph Noel (Grenada) as Facilitator of the contact group.

26. At its 2nd meeting, on 4 December 2024, during the CRIC/CST joint Plenaries meeting, the Committees appointed Mr. Joseph Noel (Grenada) and Mr. Alwin Dornelly (Saint Lucia) as Co-Facilitators of the joint CRIC and CST contact group on matters relating to CRIC agenda item 3 (Improving the procedures for communication of information as well as the quality and formats of reports to be submitted to the Conference of the Parties) and CST agenda item 4 (c) (Interfacing science and policy, and sharing knowledge: Information on modalities for reporting on the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework).

27. At its 5th meeting, on 13 December 2024, the Committee elected, by acclamation, the following as Vice-Chairs for its forthcoming seventeenth session: Mr. Jean Didier Leho (Democratic Republic of the Congo), Mr. Chay Asdak (Indonesia) and Ms. Michelle Alvarez (Belize).

28. The Committee submitted eight recommendations to the COP. The Conference took action on these recommendations at its 5th meeting, on 13 December 2024.

F. Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention

29. The twenty-second session of the CRIC was convened under the chairmanship of Mr. Mirko Knezevic (Montenegro), whose appointment was confirmed by the Committee in line with rule 25 of the rules of procedure of the COP. The Committee held six meetings, from 3 to 12 December 2024.

30. At the 1st meeting, on 3 December 2024, the Committee adopted its provisional agenda as contained in document ICCD/CRIC(22)/1 and approved the organization of work for the session as contained in the annex of the document, as orally revised.

31. The Committee appointed Mr. Rodrigo Andrade Ramírez (Chile) and Ms. Anait Khurshudyan (Uzbekistan) as Vice-Chairs of the Committee.

32. Also at the same meeting, the Committee agreed to establish a contact group and appointed Mr. Alwin Dornelly (Saint Lucia) as Facilitator of the contact group.

33. At its 2nd meeting, during the CRIC/CST joint Plenaries meeting, the Committees decided to establish one joint CRIC and CST contact group (see paragraph 26 above) and appointed Mr. Joseph Noel (Grenada) and Mr. Alwin Dornelly (Saint Lucia) as Co-Facilitators of this contact group.

34. At its 6th meeting, on 12 December 2024, the Committee elected, by acclamation, the following as Vice-Chairs for its forthcoming twenty-third and twenty-fourth sessions: Mr. Charles Lange (Kenya), Ms. Jia Xiaoxia (China) and Mr. Pablo Viegas Aurelio (Argentina).

35. The Committee submitted eight recommendations to the COP. The Conference took action on these recommendations at its 8th meeting, on 13 December 2024.

G. Committee of the Whole

36. At its 2nd meeting, on 2 December 2024, the Conference decided to establish a Committee of the Whole (COW) and to allocate to the Committee the agenda items listed in paragraph 16 of the COP 16 agenda contained in document ICCD/COP(16)/1/Rev.1, as orally amended.

37. Also, at its 2nd meeting, the Conference designated Ms. Anna Luise (Italy) as Chair of the COW. The Committee held five meetings, from 2 to 13 December 2024.

38. At its 1st meeting, the Committee established two contact groups: (a) contact group 1 on programme and budget matters; and (b) contact group 2 on COW matters other than the programme and budget. The Committee appointed Mr. Balchinluvsan Lkhagvasuren (Mongolia) as the Facilitator of contact group 1 on programme and budget matters and Mr. Asher Nkegbe (Ghana) as the Facilitator of contact group 2 on COW matters other than the programme and budget.

39. The Committee submitted eighteen recommendations to the COP. The Conference took action on these recommendations at its 5th meeting, on 13 December 2024.

H. Attendance

40. The sixteenth session of the COP was attended by representatives of the following 174 Parties to the Convention:

Albania	Australia	Barbados
Algeria	Austria	Belarus
Angola	Azerbaijan	Belgium
Antigua and Barbuda	Bahamas	Benin
Argentina	Bahrain	Bhutan
Armenia	Bangladesh	

Bosnia and Herzegovina	Gambia	Maldives
Botswana	Georgia	Mali
Brazil	Germany	Malta
Burkina Faso	Ghana	Marshall Islands
Burundi	Greece	Mauritania
Cabo Verde	Grenada	Mauritius
Cambodia	Guatemala	Mexico
Cameroon	Guinea	Micronesia (Federated States of)
Canada	Guinea-Bissau	Moldova, Republic of
Central African Republic	Guyana	Mongolia
Chad	Haiti	Montenegro
Chile	Honduras	Morocco
China	Hungary	Mozambique
Colombia	India	Namibia
Comoros	Indonesia	Nauru
Congo, Democratic Republic of	Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Nepal
Congo, Republic of	Iraq	Netherlands (Kingdom of the)
Cook Islands	Ireland	Nicaragua
Costa Rica	Israel	Niger
Côte d'Ivoire	Italy	Nigeria
Cuba	Japan	Norway
Cyprus	Jordan	Oman
Czech Republic	Kazakhstan	Pakistan
Djibouti	Kenya	Palau
Dominica	Kiribati	Panama
Dominican Republic	Korea, Republic of	Papua New Guinea
Ecuador	Kuwait	Paraguay
Egypt	Kyrgyzstan	Peru
El Salvador	Lao, People's Democratic Republic	Philippines
Equatorial Guinea	Lebanon	Poland
Eritrea	Lesotho	Portugal
Eswatini	Liberia	Qatar
Ethiopia	Libya	Romania
European Union	Lithuania	Russian Federation
Fiji	Luxembourg	Rwanda
Finland	Madagascar	Saint Kitts and Nevis
France	Malawi	Saint Lucia
Gabon	Malaysia	Samoa

Sao Tome and Principe	Suriname	Uganda
Saudi Arabia	Sweden	Ukraine
Senegal	Switzerland	United Arab Emirates
Serbia	Syrian Arab Republic	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Seychelles	Tajikistan	
Sierra Leone	Tanzania, United Republic of	United States of America
Slovakia	Thailand	Uruguay
Solomon Islands	Timor-Leste	Uzbekistan
Somalia	Togo	Vanuatu
South Africa	Tonga	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)
South Sudan	Trinidad and Tobago	
Spain	Tunisia	Viet Nam
Sri Lanka	Türkiye	Yemen
State of Palestine	Turkmenistan	Zambia
Sudan	Tuvalu	Zimbabwe

41. The session was also attended by observers from the following States not Party to the Convention: Holy See

42. The following United Nations organs, organizations and programmes, offices and specialized agencies were represented:

Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs

Department of Public Information

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Economic Commission for Africa

Economic Commission for Europe

Food and Agriculture Organization

Global Environment Facility

Green Climate Fund

International Fund for Agricultural Development

International Labour Office

International Organization for MigrationInternational Trade Centre

Secretariat to the Convention on Biological Diversity

UN Habitat

UN Water

UN Women

United Nations Capital Development Fund

United Nations Development Coordination Office

United Nations Development Programme

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
 United Nations Environment Programme
 United Nations Environment Programme Regional Office for West Asia
 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
 United Nations Global Compact
 United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
 United Nations Industrial Development Organization
 United Nations Institute for Training and Research
 United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
 United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
 United Nations Office for Project Services
 United Nations Secretariat
 United Nations University
 United Nations Volunteers
 World Bank
 World Food Programme
 World Meteorological Organization

43. The session was also attended by representatives of 63 intergovernmental organizations, 39 business and industry entities and 461 civil society organizations.

I. Documentation

44. The documents submitted for the consideration of the COP at its sixteenth session are listed in annex IX.

III. Inclusion of activities of non-governmental organizations within the official programme of work of the Conference of the Parties: open dialogue session

(Agenda item 1 (b) and (f))

45. The Conference held two open dialogue sessions under agenda item 1 (b) and (f) at its 6th and 7th meetings, on 5 and 9 December 2024.

46. Mr. Mauro Centritto from (DesertNET International of Italy) moderated the first open dialogue session held on 5 December 2024 titled “Civil society contributions on inclusive and sustainable agri-food systems”.

47. Presentations were made by the following panellists: Ms. Erimelinda Temba (Islands of Peace of the United Republic Tanzania), Ms. Priyanka Patil (Brahma Kumaris of India), Ms. Glenda Mangia (Fundación Cauce of Argentina), Mr. Anand Ethirajalu (Conscious Planet of India), Ms. Sopiko Babalashvili (Caucasus Environmental NGO Network of Georgia) and Ms. Aii Shatou Ali (Mbororo Pastoralists of Cameroon).

48. Statements were made by the representatives of Armenia, Australia, Belarus, Cabo Verde, Chile, China, Iraq, Morocco, Senegal, South Africa, the State of Palestine and the United States of America.

49. A statement was also made by the European Union.

50. In addition, a statement was made by the representative of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women).
51. The representative of the Council of Palm Oil Producing Countries made a statement.
52. A statement was made by the United Confederation of Taino People on behalf of civil society.
53. In the ensuing discussion, the panellists responded to comments made and questions posed from the floor.
54. Ms. Ellen Otaru Okoedion (Journalists Environmental Association of Tanzania) moderated the second open dialogue session held on 9 December 2024 titled “Civil society perspectives on how to foster co-creation of local knowledge and science, technology and innovation”.
55. An opening statement was delivered by Ms. Tarja Halonen, Former President of Finland and UNCCD Land Ambassador.
56. A keynote statement was made by Ms. Celeste Drake, Deputy Director-General of the International Labour Organization.
57. Presentations were made by the following panellists: Ms. Fatou Diouf (Enda Tiers-Monde, Senegal), Ms. Tiffany Marcelle (Caribbean Youth Environment Network, Dominica), Ms. Cécile Mawe Moumbe épse Nzoda (Youth Action for Sustainable Development, Cameroon), Ms. Jiajia Luo (China Green Foundation) and Ms. Valentina Kastarakova (Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee and representative of the Indigenous People of the Altai Region, Russian Federation).
58. Statements were made by the representatives of Brazil, Burundi, Cambodia, China, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, the United States of America, and Yemen.
59. A statement was also made by the European Union.
60. In addition, a statement was made by the representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.
61. The panellists responded to comments made and questions posed from the floor.

IV. Special segment

(Agenda item 5)

A. High-level ministerial dialogues

(a) From Geneva to Riyadh and beyond, enhancing global and national policy instruments for a proactive drought management approach

62. The high-level ministerial dialogue was co-chaired by H.E. Bernice Swarts (Deputy Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment of South Africa) and Mr. Cary Fowler (Special Envoy for Global Food Security of the United States of America).
63. Introductory remarks were delivered by the Executive Secretary of the UNCCD.
64. The keynote speakers, Mr. Achim Steiner (Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme), Mr. Saroj Kumar Jha (Global Director for the World Bank Group’s Water Global Practice), H.E. Muhammed Al Jasser (President of the Islamic Development Bank) and Ms. Shaimaa Al-Sheiby (Vice-President of the Organization for Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Fund for International Development) made presentations.

(b) Unlocking public and private finance for land restoration and drought resilience

65. The high-level ministerial dialogue was co-chaired by H.E. Aziz Abdulkhakov (Minister of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change of Uzbekistan) and H.E. Pasi Hellman (Under-Secretary of State for Development Policy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland).

66. Welcome remarks were delivered by the Executive Secretary of the UNCCD.

67. Remarks were also delivered by H.E. Muhammad Al Jasser (President of the Islamic Development Bank) (also on behalf of the Arab Coordination Group), Mr. Abdulhamid Alkhalifa (President of the OPEC Fund for International Development), Mr. Achim Steiner (Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme), Mr. Mahmoud Mohieldin (United Nations Special Envoy for Financing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development), Mr. Simon Stiell (Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change), Ms. Astrid Schomaker (Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity), Ms. Gelsomina Vigliotti (Vice President of the European Investment Bank) and Ms. Valerie Hickey (Director at the World Bank).

68. A presentation was made by H.E. Khalid A. Al-Falih (Minister of Investment of Saudi Arabia).

(c) Impacts of land degradation and drought on forced migration, security and prosperity

69. The high-level ministerial dialogue was co-chaired by H.E. Adrian Forde (Minister of Environment and National Beautification, Green and Blue Economy of Barbados) and H.E. Hugo Morán Fernández (Secretary of State for the Environment of Spain).

70. Introductory remarks were delivered by the Executive Secretary of the UNCCD.

71. Remarks were also delivered by H.E. Carlos Alvarado Quesada (former President of Costa Rica) and Ms. Ugochi Daniels (Deputy Director General for Operations of the International Organization for Migration).

72. The Chairpersons' summaries of the high-level ministerial dialogues may be found in annex II to the current report.

B. High-level interactive dialogues

(a) Sustainable, resilient and inclusive agrifood systems

73. The high-level interactive dialogue titled “Enabling environment to catalyse the transformation towards sustainable, resilient and inclusive agrifood systems” was held on 5 December 2024 during the Agri-food System Day of COP 16. This high-level interactive dialogue was organized in coordination with several partners, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) as co-leads of the Agri-food System Day, as well as with several other partners.

74. The dialogue was opened by Her Royal Highness Princess Basma bint Ali of Jordan, FAO Goodwill Ambassador, followed by H.E. Dr. Osama Ibrahim Faqeeha, Deputy Minister of Environment of the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture of Saudi Arabia, who announced the launch of the Riyadh Action Agenda.

75. The high-level interactive dialogue comprised four panel discussions,¹ bringing together a number of agrifood systems actors, including the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, the President of IFAD, the Assistant Director-General of FAO, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture of the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture of Saudi Arabia, the Secretary of State of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry

¹ Panel 1: Riyadh Action Agenda: Accelerating the transformation of agri-food systems; Panel 2: How governments can accelerate progress toward sustainable, resilient and inclusive agrifood systems; Panel 3: Enablers for Transformation: finance, governance, science, technology and innovation; and Panel 4: Frontline perspectives delivered by the representatives of farmers' communities.

and Fisheries of Cambodia, the Secretary of State of the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Light Industry of Mongolia, the Executive Managing Director of the Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centers, as well as representatives of farmers' organizations from different continents.

(b) The role of subnational governments to accelerate sustainable land management

76. The high-level interactive dialogue titled “Mayors’ Forum: Local leadership and innovative governance for sustainable land management” was held on 6 December 2024 during Governance Day as part of the COP 16 Action Agenda, and organized through the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments under the coordination of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and in partnership with ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability.

77. The high-level interactive dialogue was opened by H.E. Abdulrahman Abdulmohsen Al-Fadley, Minister of Water, Environment and Agriculture of the Saudi Arabia and President of COP 16, and Deputy Mayor of Riyadh, Mr. Walid Al-Akrish, who delivered welcoming remarks. Mr. Ibrahim Altay, UCLG Executive President and Mayor of Konya, Türkiye, also addressed the Mayors’ Forum.

78. Ms. Anacláudia Rossbach, Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), delivered her remarks via a video message.

79. The Mayors’ Forum hosted an exchange of experiences among mayors, governors and representatives of local authorities from all over the world in the form of two panel sessions: one on sustainable land management and the other on integrated water resource management.

(c) Science-technology and innovation

80. The high-level interactive dialogue titled “Healing our land through science and Earth Intelligence” was held on 9 December 2024 during Science, Technology and Innovation Day as part of the COP16 Action Agenda.

81. The dialogue was opened with a keynote speech by H.E. Munir Eldesouki, the President of King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology. Two panels on science gaps and data gaps were moderated by Ms. Zita Sebesvari, Deputy Director of United Nations University – Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) and Ms. Yana Gevorgyan, Director of the Group on Earth Observations (GEO) Secretariat, respectively.

82. The Chairpersons’ summaries of the high-level interactive dialogues may be found in annex III to the current report.

C. Formal statements session

83. On 3 December, during the formal statements session, statements were made by the following representatives: Algeria, Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, the Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, Djibouti, the Dominican Republic, Egypt, Eswatini, France, Gabon, Guinea, Hungary, India, Iraq, Kenya, Lesotho, Mali, Mongolia, Nepal, the Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Seychelles, Spain, Sri Lanka, the Sudan, Suriname, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Republic of Tanzania, the United Arab Emirates, the United States of America and Zimbabwe.

84. Statements were also made by representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations: International Union for Conservation of Nature, the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, Crop Trust, and the Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean.

85. Representatives from the following organizations in the United Nations system made statements: FAO, the International Labour Organization and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

86. The final list of speakers may be consulted on the UNCCD website.²

V. Decisions and resolution adopted by the Conference of the Parties

87. At its 8th and 9th meetings, on 13 and 14 December 2024, the Conference adopted 37 decisions and one resolution.

A. Decisions taken at the recommendation of the President of the Conference of the Parties

88. At the recommendation of the President of its sixteenth session, the Conference adopted the following decisions:

- 30/COP.16 Special segment
- 31/COP.16 Riyadh Political Declaration

B. Decisions taken at the recommendation of the Bureau

89. At the recommendation of the Bureau of the COP at its sixteenth session, the Conference adopted the following decisions:

- 37/COP.16 Credentials of delegations

C. Decisions taken at the recommendation of the Committee of the Whole

90. At the recommendation of the COW, the Conference adopted the following decisions:

- 1/COP.16 Multi-year workplan for the Convention institutions (2025–2028)
- 5/COP.16 Participation and involvement of civil society organizations in meetings and processes of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
- 6/COP.16 Participation and involvement of the private sector in meetings and processes of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
- 7/COP.16 Enhancing the implementation of the Convention and the 2018–2030 Strategic Framework of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
- 8/COP.16 Promotion and strengthening of relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies
- 10/COP.16 Programme and budget for the biennium 2025–2026
- 23/COP.16 The positive role that measures taken under the Convention can play to address desertification, land degradation and drought as one of the drivers that causes migration
- 24/COP.16 Follow-up on policy frameworks and thematic issues: Drought
- 25/COP.16 Follow-up on policy frameworks and thematic issues: Gender
- 26/COP.16 Report from the Gender Caucus³
- 27/COP.16 Follow-up on policy frameworks and thematic issues: Sand and dust storms
- 28/COP.16 Follow-up on policy frameworks and thematic issues: Land tenure
- 29/COP.16 Rangelands and pastoralists

² See <https://www.unccd.int/official-documents/cop-16-riyadh-saudi-arabia-2024/cop-5th-meeting>.

³ The report from the Gender Caucus can be found in annex VII.

- 32/COP.16 Declaration of civil society organizations attending the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties⁴
- 33/COP.16 Declaration of the Youth Forum⁵
- 34/COP.16 Declaration of the Indigenous Peoples⁶
- 35/COP.16 Report from the Business for Land Forum⁷
- 36/COP.16 Programme of work for the seventeenth session of the Conference of the Parties

D. Decisions taken at the recommendation of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention

91. At the recommendation of the CRIC, the Conference adopted the following decisions:

- 2/COP.16 Promotion of capacity-building to further the implementation of the Convention
- 3/COP.16 Progress made in the mobilization of resources for the implementation of the Convention and Sustainable Development Goal 15.3 matters
- 4/COP.16 Improving the procedures for communication of information as well as the quality and formats of reports to be submitted to the Conference of the Parties
- 9/COP.16 Collaboration with the Global Environment Facility
- 11/COP.16 Assessment of implementation of the Convention against strategic objectives 1–4 of the 2018–2030 Strategic Framework of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
- 12/COP.16 Assessment of financial flows
- 13/COP.16 Programme of work for the twenty-third session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention
- 14/COP.16 Date and venue of the twenty-third session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention

E. Decisions taken at the recommendation of the Committee on Science and Technology

92. At the recommendation of the CST, the Conference adopted the following decisions:

- 15/COP.16 Science-policy recommendations on sustainable land use systems
- 16/COP.16 Science-policy recommendations on aridity trends, projections and impacts
- 17/COP.16 Science-policy recommendations emanating from the Science-Policy Interface analysis of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Sixth Assessment Report
- 18/COP.16 Knowledge sharing, technology transfer and innovation
- 19/COP.16 Avoiding, reducing and reversing land and soil degradation of agricultural lands
- 20/COP.16 Future functioning of the Science-Policy Interface
- 21/COP.16 Work programme of the Science-Policy Interface for the biennium 2025–2026

⁴ The declaration of civil society organizations attending the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties can be found in annex VIII.

⁵ The declaration of the Youth Forum can be found in annex IV.

⁶ The declaration of the Indigenous Peoples can be found in annex VI.

⁷ The report from the Business for Land Forum can be found in annex V.

22/COP.16 Programme of work for the seventeenth session of the Committee on Science and Technology

F. Resolution adopted by the Conference

93. At its 9th meeting, on 13 December 2024, the Conference adopted the following resolution at the recommendation of Côte d'Ivoire:

1/COP.16 Expression of gratitude to the Government and People of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

VI. Conclusion of the session

Adoption of the report of the Conference of the Parties on its sixteenth session

(Agenda item 8)

94. At its 9th meeting, on 13 December 2024, the Conference adopted the draft report on its sixteenth session (ICCD/COP(16)/L.7) and authorized the Rapporteur, with the assistance of the secretariat, to complete the report, as appropriate.

95. Also at the 9th meeting, Mr. Ibrahim Thiaw, Executive Secretary of the UNCCD, made a statement.

96. H.E. Abdulrahman Abdulmohsen Al-Fadley, Minister of Environment, Water and Agriculture of Saudi Arabia and President of COP 16, made concluding remarks and declared closed the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

Annex I

[English only]

Riyadh Political Declaration of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification at its 16th Session

We, the Ministers and the Representatives gathered for the high-level segment at the 16th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), held from 2nd to 13th December 2024 in Riyadh at the invitation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, with the urgent aim of taking effective, inclusive and sustainable multilateral actions to address the increasing challenges posed by desertification, land degradation and drought and their devastating global impacts on our communities, economies, climate, ecosystems, water, food security and nutrition, human health and well-being, in an effort towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

Expressing our sincere appreciation to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for its hospitality and convening of the 16th session of the Conference of the Parties and to the UNCCD Secretariat for the organization of the session;

Noting with great concern the significant threats and global negative trends posed by desertification, land degradation, the increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events, with negative consequences such as droughts, and sand and dust storms on communities, ecosystems, and food production;⁸ as well as the role played by climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution in exacerbating such significant threats,⁹ and recalling that the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) represents the cornerstone of global efforts to tackle desertification, land degradation and drought;

Noting that over 70% of the Earth's land has already been transformed from its natural state¹⁰ and that up to 40% of Earth's land is degraded, that droughts cause annual damage costs of US\$307 billion per year,¹¹ and that from 2015 to 2019, at least 100 million hectares of healthy and productive lands were degraded annually,¹² affecting global food security as well as water availability and impacting 3.2 billion people of which an estimated 1.3 billion people are directly exposed to land degradation;¹³

Recognizing that desertification, land degradation and drought affect everyone and undermine the enjoyment of certain human rights, including the right to food, and the right to safe drinking water and sanitation as derived from the right to an adequate standard of living, while emphasizing their disproportionate impact on people in vulnerable situations, including people in poverty in both rural and urban settings, smallholder farmers, pastoralists, women, children, youth, and Indigenous Peoples;

*Recognizing that there is a nexus between climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, and sustainable development, and that without proper environmental action, arable land availability, scarce resources, and in particular water will affect the most vulnerable regions and people in vulnerable situations; *Emphasizing* the need for a holistic approach that integrates efforts to enhance land restoration and conservation*

⁸ “The Global Threat of Drying Lands: Regional and global aridity trends and future projections”, Science-Policy Interface, 2024. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Bonn, Germany.

⁹ Special Report on Climate Change and Land — IPCC site.

¹⁰ IPBES, IPCC.

¹¹ UNCCD (2024). Financial Needs Assessment; UNCCD, ELD, UNU-INWEH (2024), Economics of drought: Investing in nature-based solutions for drought resilience – proaction pays. A report by UN Convention to Combat Desertification, Economics of Land Degradation Initiative and UN University Institute for Water, Environment and Health.

¹² UNCCD Global drought snapshot 2023.

¹³ UNCCD Data Dashboard.

through measures such as Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets and drought resilience to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN); and *recognizing* the potential for synergies among the Rio Conventions while reaffirming the unique and critical role of the UNCCD in addressing desertification, land degradation and drought; and calling for balanced cooperation that enhances each Convention's core objectives and maximizes their collective impact;

Acknowledging the urgent need to reinforce global action, inclusiveness and solidarity, and to scale up support in developing countries, including the least developed countries, to help address these challenges effectively;

Welcoming the outcomes of the 29th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); and the sixth meeting of the COP serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement; the 16th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and taking note of its adopted decisions, the 6th session of the United Nations Environment Assembly on 1 March 2024, including the resolutions entitled "Strengthening international efforts to combat desertification and land degradation, restore degraded land, promote land conservation and sustainable land management, contribute to land degradation neutrality and enhance drought resilience (UNEP/EA.6/Res.14)", "Promoting synergies, cooperation or collaboration for national implementation of multilateral environmental agreements and other relevant environmental instrument" (UNEP/EA.6/Res.4) and "Combating sand and dust storms" (UNEP/EA.6/Res.7);

Emphasizing resolution 73/284 of 1 March 2019, declaring 2021–2030 as the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, and its relevance to combating desertification and land degradation; General Assembly resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015, "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"; General Assembly resolution 69/313 of 27 July 2015 on the Addis Ababa Action Agenda from the Third International Conference on Financing for Development; as well as the General Assembly's proclamation of 2025-2034 as the United Nations Decade on Combating Sand and Dust Storms;

Emphasizing the importance of advancing integrated, science, and evidence-based approaches, informed by the best available science, and recognizing the contributions of Indigenous Peoples and of local communities, including their knowledge, to combating desertification, land degradation and drought; further *recognizing* the importance of high-quality, timely and disaggregated data for the effective implementation and monitoring of the Convention, and calling upon Parties to enhance capacity-building efforts and technical support for data collection, analysis, and reporting, particularly paying attention to the circumstances of developing countries, including least developed countries, ensuring they have the necessary resources and infrastructure for effective data-driven decision-making; *Welcoming* the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform (IPBES) assessment of land degradation and restoration;

Reaffirming the strategic objectives of the UNCCD Strategic Framework 2018-2030 aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goal target 15.3 by 2030 and *recognizing* the central importance of financing to the achievement of the objectives of the Convention;

Noting that land resources contribute to our societies' and economies' wealth affecting all ecosystems, including ecosystems in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, and their interlinkages with food security and water availability and human well-being, including health;

Recognizing that land degradation constitutes one of the main problems facing humanity, due to a series of pressures that are derived from population growth, urbanization and changes in consumption habits, which translates into unsustainable land use practices, resulting in loss of land cover with impacts on soil structure and hydrological cycle and flows;

Recognizing that protection and sustainable land management, including the restoration of degraded lands, are vital for building resilience to climate change and its impacts, including on drought, conserving biodiversity, strengthening food security and water availability, and supporting livelihoods;

Recognizing the positive role that measures taken under the Convention can play to address desertification/land degradation and drought as one of the drivers that causes migration;

Acknowledging that restoration is an effective action to reverse land degradation and biodiversity loss, and may generate benefits for other environmental goals, including addressing climate change mitigation and adaptation impacts; *Recognizing* the potential for restoration initiatives to generate sustainable jobs that particularly benefit people in vulnerable situations, including Indigenous Peoples and local communities and youth;

Emphasizing the critical role of rangelands and pastoral systems in building drought resilience and achieving Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN); Underscoring the need for sustainable rangeland management practices that supports drought resilience and livelihoods;

Recognizing the critical importance of forests, including the importance of sustainable forest management, and of halting and reversing deforestation by 2030, and while delivering sustainable development and promoting an inclusive rural transformation;

Recognizing that unsustainable agricultural production is a major driver of land degradation, while also recognizing the significant dependence on healthy soils to ensure food security and nutrition; *Emphasizing* the need for increased attention on the importance of sustainable and resilient agricultural and food systems to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN);

Recognizing the importance of sustainable and integrated water resources management in enhancing drought resilience and *acknowledging* the establishment of the Global Water Organization by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, an initiative aiming to enhance knowledge sharing and promote multilateral collaboration, ultimately advancing the sustainability of water resources;

Welcoming the launch of the International Drought Resilience Alliance at the 27th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2022 and the work carried out so far within this framework, including the preparations for the establishment of an International Drought Resilience Observatory;

Welcoming the Rio Trio Initiative, launched by Azerbaijan, Colombia, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as the respective Presidencies of the UNFCCC COP29, CBD COP16, and UNCCD COP16, which highlights that the interconnections between the three Rio Conventions on desertification, biodiversity, and climate change should be considered to ensure more efficient, integrated and synergistic actions and measures, maximize their effectiveness and achieve their respective goals and targets, in line with their respective mandate and as applicable;

Emphasizing the crucial role of political leadership in driving transformative change, pursuing policy coherence and mobilizing resources to enhance land restoration and conservation and drought resilience, while improving land and water resources protection and sustainable use and management, which requires science and technology development and sharing, adopting science, knowledge-based practices that integrate knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and promote inclusive, participatory and gender and youth- responsive, and transformative global action in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);

Therefore, we, the Ministers and the Representatives gathered for the high-level segment at the 16th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD:

1. *Encourage* Parties to prioritize land degradation prevention, restoration and conservation, as well as sustainable land management, protection of water resources, and proactive drought management and resilience building, integrating these efforts into all relevant subnational, national, regional and international plans, strategies, and policies, considering also their effects on the wellbeing and quality of life, and acknowledging the urgent need to enhance support for developing countries;

2. *Invite* Parties to prioritize and accelerate actions to enhance land restoration and achieve Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets on a voluntary basis, which serve as both an accelerator and integrator for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
3. *Commit* to address the interconnections on desertification and land degradation, biodiversity and climate change between the three Rio Conventions, the UNCCD Strategic Framework 2018-2030, the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework adopted at CBD COP15 by Parties, with a view to achieve their respective objectives, goals and targets in accordance with their respective provisions and principles;
4. *Urge* Parties to enhance multilateral dialogue and action on the nexus between climate change, environmental degradation, and development, in particular in relation to water;
5. *Welcome* the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership (RGDRP), initiated by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as Host Country of the UNCCD COP16, and invite Parties, partners, and the international community to join the partnership and strengthen advocacy and support on drought resilience;
6. *Call upon* Parties to accelerate commitment towards land restoration, with the aspirational goal of restoring up to 1.5 billion hectares of degraded land by 2030, recognizing the diverse capacities and national circumstances of Parties to achieve voluntary LDN targets aligned with SDG 15.3; Recognize UNCCD's role in supporting Parties in this effort, noting that restoring 1.5 billion hectares of land by 2030 is an important measure to achieve a land-degradation-neutral world¹⁴ and recognizing the need for additional resources; and call upon parties to formulate a long term vision and targets beyond 2030 to significantly reduce the areas of degraded lands;
7. *Urge* Parties to create an enabling environment for effective land governance and to ensure inclusive participation and leadership in decision-making processes, recognizing the important contributions of all members of society, including women and girls, and youth, in addressing desertification, land degradation, and drought; Support community-led initiatives on sustainable land management, encouraging the participation of Indigenous Peoples and rural communities from the inception of policy design; Emphasize the critical role of women, youth, civil society organization and Indigenous Peoples and local communities in advancing restoration, land restoration, conservation and drought resilience;
8. *Recalls* that achieving gender equality is essential for implementing effective, sustainable, and impactful measures to prevent, mitigate, and reverse land degradation; Calls on Parties to mainstream gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in policies and actions to address desertification, land degradation and drought and recalls the invitation to parties to the Convention to legally recognize rights to equal use and ownership of land for women and the enhancement of women's equal access to land and land tenure security, as well as the promotion of gender responsive measures to combat desertification, land degradation and drought and achieve land degradation neutrality, taking into account the national context, and in this context notes the Abidjan Declaration on Achieving Gender Equality for Successful Land Restoration, which promotes all measures necessary to identify and eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, with particular attention to the rights of older women, widows, women with disabilities and young women;
9. *Urge* developed country parties to actively support, as agreed, individually or jointly, to provide substantial financial resources and other form of support to assist developing country Parties, to effectively develop and implement their own long-term plans and strategies to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought;
10. *Encourage* Parties to engage and mobilize the international community to enhance financial and technical support, and to facilitate investments from governments, International Financial Institutions (IFIs), and the private sector to achieve land restoration and land degradation neutrality at larger scale, on a voluntary basis; Recognize the needs to scale up financial flows to achieve the UNCCD's objectives;

¹⁴ See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/Goal-15/>.

11. *Call upon* Parties to foster collaborative partnerships among governments, international organizations, civil society, academia, and the private sector, as well as the International Drought Resilience Alliance, the Great Green Wall and its Accelerator, the G20 Global Land Initiative, and the Middle East Green Initiative ensuring that public interest remains paramount in efforts to address desertification, land degradation, and drought; and to Promote innovative public-private partnerships to leverage mechanisms for land restoration, fight against desertification and drought resilience, and foster innovative solutions to drought and desertification;
12. *Emphasize* the importance of education, awareness and capacity-building initiatives to empower communities in combating desertification, overcoming drought, and achieving land degradation neutrality; Support research, innovation, including, if relevant, the adoption of digital technologies, and other innovative approaches, which must address regulatory, ethical, social, environmental, and economic issues to ensure inclusive and sustainable development and nature-based solutions and/or ecosystem-based approaches to strengthen resilience;
13. *Recommend* that Parties increase their attention on the necessary sustainable transformation of agricultural and food systems to address land degradation, to ensure food security and nutrition, and to build resilience to extreme weather events such as droughts, by promoting systemic and holistic approaches such as agroecological practices and sustainable agriculture;
14. *Emphasize* the importance of mainstreaming land, soil and water issues across different sectors by adopting nationally appropriate standards and sustainable agriculture approaches such as agroforestry and agroecology, to improve sustainability, resilience and long-term productivity of sustainable food systems, taking into account different national circumstances, priorities and legislation; Stress the importance of advocating and mobilizing further investment in nature, notably through nature-based solutions that create jobs, drive economic prosperity and support human well-being;
15. *Invite* Parties to recognize the importance of fostering synergies between environmental and sustainable development policies, considering national priorities and circumstances, to ensure coherence and maximize impact, including through all modalities of development cooperation: North-South, South-South and triangular; Encourage enhanced collaboration through South-South and triangular cooperation to facilitate the exchange, particularly among developing countries; Highlight scalability and inclusivity by ensuring programs effectively benefit people in vulnerable situations, including Indigenous communities, women and girls, youth, exemplified by the Africa's iconic Great Green Wall initiative;
16. *Further call upon* Parties to strengthen international dialogue and cooperation through the strengthening of the UNCCD; Support the implementation of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, the United Nations Decade on Combating Sand and Dust Storms;
17. *Reiterate* our recognition of the role of the UNCCD in strengthening the science-policy interface; Promote inclusive multi-stakeholder partnerships among governments, civil society, the private sector, and academia to support knowledge sharing, voluntary technology transfer on mutually agreed terms, and capacity building for scalable land restoration and drought resilience initiatives;
18. *Encourage* Parties to strengthen preparedness through enhanced early warning systems and preventive measures in robust capacity building, voluntary technology transfer on mutually agreed terms, preparedness measures, risk assessment mechanisms and scaling up disaster preparedness, supported by international cooperation and with particular support for developing countries, to enable timely, proactive responses to land degradation, desertification and drought, and sand and dust storms; Integrate the knowledge, sciences and practices of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, to ensure that strategies are culturally relevant and locally effective and scale up drought, which may include disaster preparedness through mechanisms that enable and anticipatory early action, including support for the Secretary-General's Early Warnings for All, to enhance timely alerts and advance proactive drought management at all levels;

19. *Invite* Parties to promote the present declaration, and to work towards its effective and inclusive implementation, considering national circumstances and capacities, and supported by enhanced international cooperation.

Annex II

[English only]

Chairpersons' summaries of the high-level ministerial dialogues of the special segment of the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties

Ministerial Dialogue: From Geneva to Riyadh and beyond. Enhancing global and national policy instruments for proactive drought management

1. The dialogue was opened by the President of the Conference of the Parties (COP) and chaired by South Africa and the United States of America. Keynote remarks were made by principals and high-level representatives of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), United Nations Development Programme, World Bank, Islamic Development Bank and Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Fund for International Development. A short video launching the European Union's World Drought Atlas was screened.

2. Over 50 country Parties and several representatives of international organizations delivered their statements. The opening remarks stressed the efficacy of a risk-informed, systems approach to reduce vulnerability to drought and enhance multi-scale adaptation to its impacts. All keynote speakers emphasized the need to build partnerships, enhance coordination among government institutions and economic sectors, and ensure sustained finance for proactive drought management.

3. Virtually all country interventions recognized the important progress made in changing the way we think about drought – moving away from a reactive, crisis-driven model to one that emphasizes drought preparedness, risk reduction and enhanced resilience. All speakers agreed that drought has become an urgent issue linked to livelihoods, food and water security, economic development, forced migration and conflict, with no country or region unaffected.

4. There was consensus that much remains to be done and that the sixteenth session of the COP (COP 16) offers a unique opportunity for renewed commitments to align policies, finance and action plans to scale up proven interventions like sustainable land and water management, water harvesting and recycling, nature-based solutions, and innovative technologies such as drought-resistant crops and drip irrigation. In addition to the need for finance and improved infrastructure, many speakers highlighted the importance of land governance, such as ensuring tenure security and women's land rights, as well as the meaningful engagement of local communities and the private sector, as critical enabling factors for building drought resilience.

Ministerial Dialogue: Unlocking public and private finance for land restoration and Drought resilience

5. The dialogue was opened by the President of the Conference of the Parties (COP) and chaired by Finland and Uzbekistan. Keynote remarks were made by principals and high-level representatives of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), United Nations Development Programme, World Bank, Islamic Development Bank, Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries Fund for International Development, Convention on Biological Diversity, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, United Nations Special Envoy on Financing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and Arab Coordination Group.

6. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia highlighted the progress made so far and the financial commitment of Saudi Arabia to global initiatives for ecosystem restoration. Other opening remarks emphasized the urgent need for a bold and robust approach to mobilizing resources to combat the growing challenge of land degradation. They stressed the importance of channelling finance into sustainable practices and redirecting harmful subsidies, and urged governments to introduce mechanisms to encourage the private sector

to step up and build effective public–private partnerships and introduce innovative financing solutions.

7. The keynote speakers also urged countries to prioritize combating land degradation in national and regional policies and plans. They indicated that governments should promote favourable fiscal policy tools such as tax incentives and subsidies to promote green investments through green bonds, payments for ecosystem services, and access to carbon markets. All speakers agreed that the prioritization of land restoration in domestic public budgets – coupled with private investment – should be the way forward for countries. At the same time, they acknowledged that the private sector needs support from financial and technical institutions to develop these green investments. In addition, it is important to continue to simplify the procedures to access global multilateral environmental funds, such as the Global Environment Facility, Green Climate Fund and Adaptation Fund.

8. All countries highlighted and appreciated the efforts made so far to conserve land and ecosystems but emphasized the need for a paradigm shift in view of the growing challenge of land degradation. Business-as-usual approaches will not help to address this existential challenge, therefore everyone must work together in solidarity as land and ecosystems transcend borders and restoration efforts will only be effective with strong partnerships among all relevant stakeholders.

9. Several countries stated that it is important to establish a dedicated financing mechanism to build drought resilience amongst communities and address their impacts. They also indicated that the findings of the Intergovernmental Working Group Report on drought financing should be carefully considered during proceedings of the sixteenth session of the COP. All countries agreed that the volume of grant funding from global funding agencies should be increased and complemented with other funding sources to maximize impact. One country stated that “only together can we bring the change we need,” as evidenced by the success of Great Green Wall Initiative.

Ministerial Dialogue: Impacts of land degradation and drought on forced migration, security and prosperity

10. The dialogue was opened by the President of the Conference of the Parties (COP) and chaired by Barbados and Spain. Keynote remarks were made by the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the Goodwill Ambassador Baaba Maal, Mr. Carlos Alvarado Quesada, former President of Costa Rica, and Ms. Ugochi Daniels, Deputy Director General of the International Organization for Migration.

11. The keynote speakers stressed that the challenges posed by desertification/land degradation and drought exacerbate competition over resources, which tends to compromise national security, erode social cohesion and increase political fragility and conflict, all of which can accelerate forced migration and displacement. Over 30 countries and several representatives of international organizations made statements. All agreed that land degradation and drought are among the root causes of forced migration, while recognizing that regular migration and remittances can be a significant opportunity to alleviate poverty and enhance community resilience.

12. Virtually all interventions recognized that sustainable land management and restoration, and drought resilience are essential building blocks to ensure global stability, security, sustainability and prosperity, offering transformative avenues for sustainable development, conflict prevention and inclusive peacebuilding as well as addressing forced migration and displacement. Systemic challenges require collaboration at regional and global levels to mitigate forced migration, which leads to insecurity, conflict and greater terrorist activity. Countries must leverage their land degradation neutrality and other ecosystem restoration commitments to overcome these challenges. As we advance land and water management solutions, we must foster a just transition for a more resilient and equitable economic model.

13. There was consensus that complex phenomena require coordinated solutions, such as the Initiative on Sustainability, Stability and Security (3S Initiative) in West Africa. This includes a focus on the development–peace nexus, which requires committed action at the local level. Some stressed that the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP

16) to the UNCCD is an opportune moment to engage in respectful dialogue and reaffirm commitments to reduce climate-induced drivers of migration, particularly those that contribute the most to global emissions. In addition, on reducing urban/rural inequalities, many speakers highlighted the importance of land governance, such as ensuring tenure security and women's land rights, as well as the meaningful engagement of local communities and the private sector, as critical enabling factors for reducing rural outmigration and managing unplanned urban expansion.

Annex III

[English only]

Chairpersons' summaries of the high-level interactive dialogues of the special segment of the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties

High-level interactive dialogue: Enabling environment to catalyse the transformation towards sustainable, resilient and inclusive agrifood systems

1. The high-level interactive dialogue titled “Enabling environment to catalyse the transformation towards sustainable, resilient and inclusive agrifood systems” was held on 5 December 2024 during the Agri-food System Day of the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). This high-level interactive dialogue was organized in coordination with several partners, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) as co-leads of the Agri-food System Day, as well as with several other partners. The session was attended by 370 people.

Opening and keynote speaker

2. Her Royal Highness Princess Basma bint Ali of Jordan, FAO Goodwill Ambassador, emphasized the urgent need to transform agrifood systems to address multiple overlapping challenges, particularly in the Near East and North Africa region where water scarcity and land degradation are severe. While acknowledging that one third of global agricultural land faces degradation, she framed this crisis as an opportunity to implement sustainable practices that could simultaneously enhance food security, protect biodiversity, sequester carbon and improve climate resilience. She called for coordinated action across sectors, highlighting the role of government policies, private investment and farmer empowerment – especially for women and youth – in achieving these transformative goals. “By adopting sustainable and inclusive practices, we can turn agrifood systems into solutions for some of the most pressing challenges of our time,” said Princess Basma, calling on “Parties and global communities to take bold action, driving forward policies and investment that will accelerate the transition towards sustainable and inclusive agrifood systems”. She also highlighted that “the Agri-food Systems component of the Riyadh Action Agenda serves as a platform for showcasing innovative collaborative solutions that address food security, land degradation and climate challenges in tandem. It represents a commitment to creating actionable pathways towards a more sustainable and inclusive future”. Princess Basma closed with a powerful message: “Land is life. Without land, we have no life, there is no future. It is our responsibility to leave a better world for our children.”

3. H.E. Dr. Osama Ibrahim Faqeeha, Deputy Minister of Environment of the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture of Saudi Arabia, launched the Riyadh Action Agenda on behalf of the COP 16 Presidency, and presented it as an effort to harness the collective energies of diverse non-state actors, together with state actors, to promote ambitious, voluntary action and partnerships in support of the UNCCD goal of restoring 1.5 billion hectares of degraded land by 2030 to achieve land degradation neutrality. Dr. Faqeeha highlighted that people need to be at the centre of these efforts, particularly those on the frontline of land degradation and desertification. Through initiatives like the Global Flagship Initiative for Food Security, the UNCCD Rangelands Flagship Initiative, and the Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils, he explained that they could scale up responses to address degraded agricultural land while promoting sustainable and inclusive food systems. “It is time for action,” said Dr. Faqeeha. “We have talked enough, but really the action is lacking. Initiatives, finance, private sector participation are lacking. We need to face this today, because if we delay until tomorrow, the impacts will be exponentially multiplied. This is the focus of this COP 16 and the Saudi Arabia Presidency: to have a Riyadh Action Agenda, and that is why we are launching it today. We would like to lead by example, reflecting our wishes into action

on the ground. We call upon all of you to join us.” Dr. Faqeeha called on participants to “make this COP about action, let us translate our ambition and wishes into initiatives, and be proud that we have a Riyadh Action Agenda that could be a legacy, that we really cherish and continue to build for the future”.

Panel 1 – The Riyadh Action Agenda: Accelerating the transformation of agrifood systems¹⁵

4. Panel 1 convened high-level representatives from international organizations, civil society and the private sector to explore practical pathways for transforming agrifood systems through the Riyadh Action Agenda. Mr. Gonzalo Muñoz Abogabir moderated discussions on critical issues ranging from financing mechanisms for smallholder farmers to landscape-level business approaches for addressing land degradation. “The Riyadh Action Agenda is focusing on people in the centre,” he highlighted, “with action plans that need to be prioritized in the needs of vulnerable communities, and it needs to be co-designed and incorporate traditional Indigenous and local knowledge into the solutions and promote a just transition. It will build alignment and drive progress toward shared goals and objectives in the critical action areas of land restoration, drought and water resilience and agrifood systems, with key enablers around finance, governance and science, technology and innovation.” He went on to thank “Dr. Osama and Saudi Arabia for elevating the importance of agrifood systems transformation onto the global stage and embedding it into the agenda of the UNCCD”.

5. IFAD President Mr. Alvaro Lario highlighted the organization’s strategies for building smallholder farmer resilience while restoring soil health. President Lario referred to the announcement¹⁶ that the World Bank is doubling its agrifinance and agribusiness commitments, which will rise to USD 9 billion annually by 2030, focusing on small-scale farmers and small agribusinesses, and calling for mechanisms to implement these investments and take them to scale.

6. The United Nations Environment Programme Executive Director Ms. Inger Andersen outlined key challenges and opportunities for accelerating food system transformation, calling on participants to “focus on what we eat, how we produce it, what inputs we use, and how much we waste”. “Food is history, identity, culture,” said Ms. Anderson, and “food systems are an absolutely fundamental element of all of the Rio conventions”.

7. Ms. Esther Penunia from the Asian Farmers’ Association for Sustainable Rural Development brought critical insights from family farmers who produce 80 per cent of food in Africa and Asia, emphasizing their frontline role in addressing land degradation. “I feel much hope and happiness because we see that the Riyadh Action Agenda recognizes the role of family farmers and frontline actors in the work for restoring our lands and ecosystems,” she said, “as well as in making a great contribution to make our food systems resilient and sustainable.” Ms. Penunia called on policies and incentives that target frontline workers, stating that “there are 514 million family farms in the world, out of which 80 per cent are small scale. If we help them, we can achieve this agenda in the next five years”.

8. Mr. Oliver Oliveros from the Agroecology Coalition explored how agri-food system transformation could advance goals across the Rio conventions. “First, there is an opportunity to embed and put in front and centre the systems thinking and doing into NDCs, NBSAPs and LDN,” he said. “Second, we need to scale finance. Third, supporting countries that are championing agroecology (e.g. Colombia, Brazil, Tanzania, Kenya and many more). And finally, supporting frontline food systems actors, not only making them involved in policy

¹⁵ Mr. Alvaro Lario, President, IFAD; Ms. Inger Andersen, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme; Ms. Esther Penunia, Secretary General, Asian Farmers Association for Sustainable Rural Development for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA); Mr. Oliver Oliveros, Coordinator and Head of Secretariat, Agroecology Coalition; Ms. Jennifer Morris, Chief Executive Officer, The Nature Conservancy; Ms. Diane Holdorf, Executive Vice President, World Business Council for Sustainable Development.

¹⁶ See https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2024/10/23/world-bank-group-announces-strategic-pivot-in-agribusiness-doubles-financial-commitment?cid=ECR_TT_worldbank_EN_EXT

discussions but, more importantly, governing and managing resources, and making funding mechanisms as simple and accessible as possible.”

9. Ms. Jennifer Morris from The Nature Conservancy focused on the soil-water-agrifood nexus. With explicit examples of action happening across the world, Ms. Morris stated that, for the transformation towards sustainable, resilient and inclusive agrifood systems, “soil is watershed health, and water is also critical”.

10. Ms. Holdorf from the World Business Council for Sustainable Development concluded by examining business sector approaches to achieving holistic outcomes for people, climate and nature through landscape-level interventions, announcing that the Action Agenda on Regenerative Landscapes reported substantial progress in 2024, with collective investments in regenerative landscapes reaching over USD 6 billion, nearly a threefold increase from the previous year. “Businesses have made the commitment to action. We need that even more, and the Riyadh Action Agenda provides the enabling framework to go further and faster to that goal,” said Ms. Holdorf. “Having an Action Agenda that brings together the themes of the three COPs but really focuses on the solutions that we need to improve our lands and adjust to drought challenges is going to make a very substantial difference, and business is really committed to supporting this.”

Panel 2. How Governments can accelerate progress toward sustainable, resilient and inclusive agrifood systems¹⁷

11. Panel 2 brought together senior government officials, international institutions and Indigenous representatives to examine how governments can drive progress toward sustainable agrifood systems with a specific focus on effective governance mechanisms, policy coordination and innovative institutional arrangements. It explored the critical role of cross-ministerial coordination, particularly between ministries of environment and agriculture, the power of inclusive consultative approaches, and strategies for re-orienting policies and public finance to support this transformation.

12. Ms. Aissatou Oumarou from the Network of Indigenous and Local Populations for the Sustainable Management of Forest Ecosystems in Central Africa addressed critical issues of land tenure security and women’s rights, while Dr. Valerie Hickey, World Bank Global Director for Environment, Natural Resources and Blue Economy, examined how to repurpose the USD 650 billion in annual agricultural subsidies toward nature-positive practices. The Panel featured insights from three countries implementing distinctive approaches: H.E. Ahmed Saleh Aiadh AlKhamshi, Deputy Minister for Agriculture of Saudi Arabia, discussed the benefits of integrating environment, agriculture and water under one ministry; H.E. Dr. Pyseth Meas, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Cambodia, shared experiences with their Conservation Agriculture platform; and H.E. Jambaltseren Tumur-Uya, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Light Industry, outlined inter-ministerial coordination strategies for managing vast rangelands while meeting international commitments.

Panel 3. Enablers for Transformation: Finance, Governance, Science, Technology and Innovation¹⁸

13. Panel 3 convened leaders from research institutions, international organizations, farmers’ associations and financial institutions to explore key enablers for transforming

¹⁷ Ms. Aissatou Oumarou, Deputy Coordinator, Network of Indigenous and Local Populations for the Sustainable Management of Forest Ecosystems in Central Africa (REPALEAC); Dr. Valerie Hickey, Global Director for Environment, Natural Resources and Blue Economy, World Bank; H.E. Ahmed Saleh Aiadh AlKhamshi, Deputy Minister for Agriculture of Saudi Arabia; H.E. Dr. Pyseth Meas, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Cambodia; H.E. Jambaltseren Tumur-Uya, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Light Industry.

¹⁸ Mr. Alberto Broch, President, Confederation of Family Producers’ Organizations of South America (COPROFAM), and Vice-President, World Rural Forum (WRF); Dr. Joao Campari, Global Leader, Food & Agriculture Practice, WWF International; Dr. Ismahane Elouafi, Executive Managing Director, CGIAR; Dr. AbdulHakim Elwaer, Assistant Director General and Regional Representative

agrifood systems. The panel examined critical aspects of finance, governance and innovation needed to accelerate change. The panel explored context-specific solutions, addressed the crucial issues of land rights and gender equity, examined how we can better track and measure progress, and discussed the revolutionary potential of data and technology. They also tackled the question of finance: how we can mobilize the resources needed to support this transformation?

14. Mr. Alberto Broch, President of the Confederation of Family Producers' Organizations of South America (COPROFAM), representing four million family farmers, highlighted essential enablers for agricultural land restoration, while the World Wide Fund for Nature's Dr. Joao Campari broadened the discussion to include food environments and consumption patterns. CGIAR's Dr. Ismahane Elouafi identified research priorities and multi-disciplinary approaches linking the Rio conventions, complemented by FAO's Dr. AbdulHakim Elwaer sharing game-changing interventions from global experience. The private sector perspective came from Nestlé's Mr. Rob Cameron on innovation and progress tracking, while European Investment Bank Vice-President Ms. Gelsomina Vigliotti concluded by addressing how financial institutions can support farmers' access to affordable financial services.

Frontline perspectives¹⁹

15. The final segment of the dialogue turned to crucial voices from the frontlines of agricultural transformation, featuring Indigenous leadership and emerging farmer representatives. Ms. Sara Edith Omi Casama brought perspectives from the Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests, while Mr. Richard Kachungu shared insights from his work with young farmers. These leaders shared lived experiences from their communities and presented a powerful call to action, emphasizing that meaningful transformation must be grounded in frontline leadership and collaborative action. Mr. Kachungu highlighted that “the Riyadh Action Agenda identified priorities are all deeply interconnected with frontline actors, youth, women and Indigenous communities who bear the burden of land degradation and the climate crisis. Young people are critical in achieving the Riyadh Action Agenda's vision.”

Closing remarks

16. The closing remarks²⁰ celebrated all the stakeholders that joined the high-level dialogue. “The Riyadh Action Agenda needs to be people-centred,” said the UNCCD Deputy Executive Secretary, Ms. Meza Murillo. “We need the private sector, engagement of non-state actors, the communities, we need technology and finance. Only catalysing, working together, and collaborating can achieve this transformation. It is possible. The Riyadh Action Agenda is part of this celebration today. We are on this journey together.” Gonzalo Muñoz Abogabir, CMG, closed the session, highlighting that “this group here is representing all actors that should be involved, from all sectors and communities, and that is the biggest seed we are planting here today. We celebrate the efforts of Saudi Arabia and the UNCCD secretariat in placing this agenda at the centre of the UNCCD. This has just started. The Riyadh Action Agenda is yours”.

for the Near East and North Africa, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); Mr. Rob Cameron, Vice President and Global Head of ESG Engagement, Nestlé; Ms. Gelsomina Vigliotti, Vice-President, European Investment Bank (EIB).

¹⁹ Ms. Sara Edith Omi Casama, Embera Leader and President of the Coordination of Territorial Women Leaders of the Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests, Global Alliance of Territorial Communities; Mr. Richard Kachungu, Co-Founder and CEO, Young Emerging Farmers Initiative (YEFI).

²⁰ Gonzalo Muñoz Abogabir, CMG, United Nations High Level Climate Action Champion for the twenty-fifth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Co-founder Ambition Loop; Ms. Andrea Meza Murillo, Deputy Executive Secretary, UNCCD.

High-Level Interactive Dialogue – Mayors’ Forum: Local leadership and innovative governance for sustainable land management

17. This high-level interactive dialogue was held during Governance Day as part of the Action Agenda of the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and featured significant contributions from the Local and Regional Governments Constituency. Organized through the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, under the coordination of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and in partnership with ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, a delegation of 30 mayors and leaders engaged in a global conversation to combat desertification/land degradation and drought as part of the Mayors’ Forum.

18. The commitment of the local and regional leaders was demonstrated through this strong mobilization as local leaders are the closest to citizens and at the forefront of efforts to avoid, reduce and reverse land degradation. Mayors, governors and representatives of local authorities from all corners of the world gathered to share their common challenges and explore practical approaches to mitigate and overcome the risks posed by unsustainable land management. ‘United against Drought and Land Degradation’ was the political commitment agreed upon and reflected in the Mayors’ Forum Call for Engagement and the creation of the Riyadh Process for the Local and Regional Governments, as a legacy of COP 16.

19. The Mayors’ Forum allowed for an exchange of experiences stemming from local realities in the form of two panel sessions: one on sustainable land management and the other on integrated water resource management. Their Excellencies, the Saudi Minister of Water, Environment and Agriculture, and the Deputy Mayor of Riyadh Municipality, opened the Forum with welcome remarks. In addition, Mr. Uğur Ibrahim Altay, Executive President of UCLG and Mayor of Konya in Türkiye, set the tone with a call to develop and strengthen multilateral mechanisms to enhance the empowerment of local action.

20. Ms. Anacláudia Rossbach, the Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) delivered a video message which underscored the need for inclusive solutions to address migration pressures, food security, and water scarcity while ensuring no one is left behind. Throughout the Forum, local leaders called for unity in combating land degradation and drought through multilevel and multi-stakeholder approaches that place communities and their territories at the heart of sustainable development. They also endorsed the Call for Engagement and shared specific needs that will underpin the structure of the Riyadh Process, including capacity-building, the devolution of governance, and direct financing for long-term planning and implementation of measures that are both proactive and cost-effective.

21. The Mayors’ Forum Call for Engagement appeals to local and regional governments to initiate a more formal, structural engagement with the UNCCD through the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments to enhance the design and financing of solutions to combat drought and land degradation. The Call for Engagement is an open invitation to other cities and their mayors and governors to join the coalition, thereby amplifying the reach and impact of the Riyadh Process for the Local and Regional Governments.

High-level interactive dialogue – Healing our land through science and Earth Intelligence

The high-level interactive dialogue titled “Healing our land through science and Earth Intelligence” was held during Science, Technology and Innovation Day as part of the Action Agenda of the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). The dialogue was opened with a keynote speech by H.E. Munir Eldesouki, the President of King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology. Two panels on science gaps and data gaps were moderated by Ms. Zita Sebesvari, Deputy Director of United Nations University – Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) and Ms. Yana Gevorgyan, Director of the Group on Earth Observations (GEO) Secretariat, respectively. They co-moderated a concluding panel on the launch of the Science, Technology and Innovation Day Action Agenda at COP 16.

The objective of the science gap panel was to highlight the need for new and additional science on land, considering the crucial roles that land and the integrity of ecosystems play in human well-being and economic prosperity, and to identify ways forward to scale up science for sustainable land management by simultaneously addressing the goals of climate change mitigation and adaptation as well as biodiversity conservation.

The scientific perspective of Saudi Arabia was reflected in a keynote speech by H.E. Abdulaziz Almalik. Representatives of the Government of Saudi Arabia and the Government of South Africa, the UNCCD Science-Policy Interface, civil society organizations, Indigenous Peoples and academic institutions made significant contributions to the science gap panel.

The objective of the data gap panel was to use good practice examples to explore enablers of and barriers to data collection to improve policy, institutional frameworks and funding mechanisms in order to scale up Earth Intelligence solutions aimed at reversing the rising trend in land degradation.

The panel included high-level government representatives from Benin, Maldives and Saudi Arabia as well as from the Group on Earth Observations Land Degradation Neutrality Flagship initiative (GEO-LDN), which provided crucial input on the potential of Earth Intelligence applications to support the objectives of the three Rio conventions. These solutions were highlighted as particularly valuable for addressing data gaps in challenging environments, such as small island developing States (SIDS) and hyper arid areas.

The purpose of the final panel was to launch the Science, Technology and Innovation Day Action Agenda to initiate efforts to fill the relevant science and data gaps. The three identified actions were as follows:

- (a) A Global Science–Policy Alliance for Land will be created to bridge the gap between intergovernmental science–policy bodies and foster synergy across the Rio conventions. Building on over a decade of experience from the UNCCD Science-Policy Interface and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, and leveraging decades of expertise generated by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in its impactful scientific assessments, this Alliance would unify and amplify the collective knowledge of these bodies. By breaking down institutional barriers and integrating knowledge systems, the Alliance would provide countries with the science needed to create cohesive, cross-sectoral strategies to accelerate climate- and biodiversity-inclusive land restoration of the global land surface;
- (b) The GEO-LDN Flagship initiative will work with UNU-EHS to launch a Regional Dialogue Forum for Pacific Small Island Developing States in 2025. This Forum will address the use of geospatial data for land degradation neutrality, biodiversity and climate change, and help fill data gaps for SIDS. It will benefit from a common science- and data-based approach tailored to the specific needs of decision-makers in the region. This Forum can support the scoping phase of the Global Science–Policy Alliance for Land;
- (c) Saudi Arabia announced its new membership with GEO, marking a significant step forward in strengthening international collaboration and advancing shared priorities. Saudi Arabia expressed its commitment to enhancing ecosystem and land monitoring capabilities to achieve both domestic and global targets with Earth Intelligence. Through this partnership, the country highlighted that it aims to contribute to a more sustainable future for Saudi Arabia, the Middle East and the global community.

Annex IV

[English Only]

Global Youth Statement for COP16: United for Land – Our Legacy, Our Future

As we face increasing environmental challenges, the global youth community stands united under the banner Youth for Land: Protecting Our Legacy, Securing Our Future. Inspired by our shared vision for a sustainable planet, we urge decisive action during the 30th anniversary of the UNCCD, Desertification and Drought Day 2024, and COP16. The theme, "United for Land: Our Legacy. Our Future," represents not just a call to action but a commitment to safeguarding the land for generations to come.

Introduction

Youth across the globe face barriers that hinder their full participation in governance, policymaking, and sustainable entrepreneurship. Limited access to markets, funding, and knowledge on desertification, land degradation, and drought (DLDD) further restricts their contributions.

We, the youth of the world, call on global leaders convening at COP16 to take bold and transformative steps to combat DLDD and implement the UNCCD Youth Engagement Strategy. Our future depends on the health of our land. We demand action to ensure a sustainable legacy.

Methodology

This statement was developed through collaborative and inclusive consultations with UNCCD Youth Caucus working groups, a workshop held on June 16, 2024, with 60 youth representatives in Bonn supported by UNCCD Land Ambassador Tarja Halonen and other high-level advocates, and input from youth networks and delegates. Contributions reflect diverse perspectives and concrete recommendations for sustainable land use. Ensuring the integration of them in the final position.

Our vision for COP16

- COP16 must serve as a turning point in the global fight against climate change and degradation of the land that sustains us. We reaffirm our commitment to sustainability, inclusion, advocacy, education, and action to ensure that the legacy we leave behind is one of positive environmental transformation, equity, and justice.
- COP16 should establish a legacy of intergenerational collaboration between the older generation of policymakers, who provide guidance for the implementation of proposed policies, and the younger generation of aspiring policymakers, empowering them to shape the future in which they will live.

Our Demands to Advance Youth Engagement at COP16 and Beyond

Advance youth-focused policies:

- Protect and promote equitable land rights for all, with a focus on marginalized youth groups, including young women, children, refugees, and Indigenous communities.
- Promote and increase youth engagement and collaboration across the Rio Conventions, fostering synergies and amplifying their advocacy messages.
- Strengthen legal frameworks and policies to safeguard youth land rights and prevent land grabs and forced evictions.
- Ensure gender inclusion and justice by guaranteeing land tenure and rights for young women and girls.

- Advocate for equitable access to land, particularly for marginalized and underrepresented communities.
- Establish robust monitoring and evaluation systems to track inclusivity and assess the impact of land-based interventions.
- Implement human-rights-based land policies that integrate Indigenous knowledge with science-based approaches.

Support meaningful participation and partnerships:

- Institutionalize youth participation in governance structures, negotiations, and decision-making processes through platforms like committees, councils, and advisory boards.
- Ensure grassroots-level participation by prioritizing equitable youth representation, particularly Indigenous and marginalized communities, supported by financial resources and inclusion in national delegations.
- Guarantee meaningful youth involvement in shaping and implementing policies, strategies, and solutions for DLDD and sustainable land management, while integrating youth voices into accountability frameworks.
- Empower youth organizations, including those in global south and conflict-affected regions, to lead and monitor land restoration projects, supported by transparent mechanisms to track engagement strategies.

Provide dedicated financial and technical support:

- Provide accessible, long-term, and flexible funding to support youth-led initiatives, sustainable land management projects, and young entrepreneurship in land restoration and nature-based solutions.
- Invest in green jobs within sustainable sectors like agriculture, forestry, and land restoration, ensuring fair wages, safe working conditions, and career development opportunities for youth.
- Reform subsidies and create incentives for innovative, scalable, and sustainable business models, while promoting multi-stakeholder collaboration to assist communities most affected by land degradation and droughts.
- Enhance sustainable land management through transparent data collection, investment in research and technology, and amplification of Indigenous practices.
- Establish inclusive platforms for practical knowledge-sharing, connecting youth in agriculture and land management with international experts and professionals to foster skills transfer.
- Prioritize financial support from dedicated funding to youth, children, and women in local communities, particularly in the Global South and conflict-affected areas, to enable effective ecosystem restoration, while ensuring that funding strategies are aligned with goals of peace, security, and resilience.

Build capacity and support networking:

- Build capacity for marginalized youth through grassroots initiatives, educational programs, and formal advocacy channels, including participation in UNCCD COP sessions.
- Promote international and intergenerational collaboration to share and replicate successful DLDD solutions, integrating Indigenous knowledge with scientific research.
- Incentivize educational and knowledge-sharing initiatives focused on DLDD solutions and sustainable practices, ensuring accessibility to youth.

- Support youth training on the science-policy interface to enhance their understanding and application of sustainable land management and resilience-building strategies.
- Create inclusive spaces for sharing best practices in sustainable agriculture, forestry, and land-use practices, fostering networking and learning opportunities for youth.

Conclusion

The intentionality of the convention to center youth engagement was fully felt for us when the parties requested the secretariat for a Youth Engagement Strategy and since then, we the young people have worked very closely with various stakeholders to respond.

The UNCCD Youth Engagement Strategy is not just a document; it is a roadmap, a call to action, and a testament to the belief that young people are not only stakeholders but catalysts for transformation in combating desertification, land degradation, and drought as it seeks to bridge this gap by embedding youth voices and actions into the very fabric of the Convention's policies and programs.

But let us be clear: a strategy, no matter how comprehensive, means little without implementation. This is why the focus of our work during the Fourth Youth Forum and throughout COP16 is so critical. Implementation transforms vision into reality, words into action, and strategies into sustainable change.

As we move forward, I urge all of us to consider three core areas where implementation must take root:

Amplifying Youth Voices in Decision-Making: Youth must have not only a seat at the table but also a voice that resonates in decisions shaping land restoration, sustainable livelihoods, and climate resilience. The Youth Engagement Strategy envisions a world where youth leadership is not optional but essential.

Scaling Youth-Led Initiatives: Across regions, young people are already implementing groundbreaking projects in agroecology, renewable energy, and community-based land restoration. Let us work together to provide the resources, mentorship, and platforms needed to amplify these efforts.

Building Capacity and Networks: Empowerment begins with knowledge. Through partnerships, workshops, and knowledge-sharing platforms, we must equip youth with the tools to influence policies, manage projects, and sustain their impact for generations to come.

Our message is clear: our shared legacy is at risk without action. Together, we must create a future where land degradation is a thing of the past and the land is a thriving foundation for all life. We, the youth, are not a distant hope for the future; we are the force driving change today. Together, let us ensure that the implementation of the UNCCD Youth Engagement Strategy is not just a goal but a reality—one that transforms our communities, regenerates our lands, and secures a sustainable future for all.

We, the youth of the world, stand united for land, calling upon the global community to listen, engage, and act.

This is our legacy, our future. Let us protect it together.

Thank you.

Annex V

[English Only]

Report from the Business for Land Forum

Summary of the Business for Land Forum

1. The Business for Land Forum brought together leaders from business, government and civil society to discuss concrete actions for restoring land, preserving ecosystems and improving resilience to drought and environmental stresses. It aimed to highlight business leadership and mobilize financial commitments from private and philanthropic sectors to scale up land restoration efforts globally and foster cross-sector collaboration to create enabling environments for sustainable land management. The forum was structured around three pillars:

- Business Operations & Value Chain Engagement
- Finance for Land Restoration
- Advocacy and Collaboration

2. The forum opened with a video which showcased the importance of sustainable land stewardship for businesses. The video was produced by the World Economic Forum and the Presidency of the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16) to showcase their endorsement of the UNCCD's Business for Land initiative. This was followed by remarks from H.E. Abdulrahman Abdulmohsen Al-Fadley, President of COP 16, who announced the Presidency's ambition of utilizing COP 16 as a launch pad to strengthen private sector involvement in efforts to combat desertification/land degradation and drought. In the following panel, Mr. Ibrahim Thiaw, Mr. André Hoffmann and Ms. Gim Huay Neo stressed that sustainable land conservation, management and restoration present a tremendous opportunity for the private sector to drive positive impact and safeguard business profitability.

3. After the opening of the event, two keynote speeches on pioneering sustainability were given. Ms. Erin Billman, the Executive Director of the Science Based Targets Network, spoke on the importance of measurable targets in driving action. Ms. Laurène Aubert, the International Nature Markets Lead from the Green Finance Institute, presented the Business for Land report titled "Corporate disclosures and target-setting on land guide".

4. The panel titled "Unlocking opportunities in sustainable land, soil and water management" further explored the opportunities that come with sustainable land management, conservation, and restoration. The panellists emphasized how land stewardship is not just an environmental, social and governance (ESG) activity for businesses but also a strategic objective; to safeguard value chains, sustainable land, soil and water stewardship must become a core part of business operations. Speakers stressed that this must be pursued with broad stakeholder alignment, ensuring equitable approaches across value chains.

5. The following segment, titled "Driving innovation and connectivity – technology and sustainability", highlighted the transformative role of technology, innovation and sustainable practices in addressing environmental challenges such as land degradation and drought resilience. Speakers emphasized the importance of collaboration between public and private sectors to develop solutions, including leveraging digital tools for land restoration, using reliable soil health data to enhance transparency and drive meaningful action, and adopting technologies like solar desalination to address water quality and salinity issues affecting coastal communities. They underscored the critical economic dependency on natural capital, advocating sustainable practices throughout supply chains and framing investments in land as opportunities to simultaneously improve biodiversity, food security and drought resilience. This integrated approach was presented as a powerful way to align environmental stewardship with business profitability and global sustainability goals.

6. In a subsequent speech, Dr. Osama Faqeeha emphasized the critical role of natural capital, particularly land, in economic systems. He outlined how land degradation, often caused by human activities across various sectors, must be addressed by integrating sustainable practices throughout supply chains. Dr. Faqeeha highlighted the essential link between business sustainability and long-term profitability, encouraging businesses to engage more deeply in discussions about land investment, portraying it as a multifaceted opportunity that supports biodiversity, food security and climate resilience.

7. In the following panel, titled “Championing land, soil and water stewardship”, five industry leaders brought together a diverse set of voices to discuss how to achieve the ambitious goal of restoring 1.5 billion hectares of land by 2030 while increasing drought resilience. The panellists discussed how they are advancing land, soil and water stewardship through their business operations, investments and advocacy, sharing the solutions they are already implementing. The experts emphasized the critical need for sustainable practices to address environmental challenges, highlighting the importance of restoring degraded ecosystems, enhancing soil health and adopting regenerative agricultural methods. They stressed that collaboration among businesses, governments, non-governmental organizations and communities is crucial for scaling up solutions, while innovation and technology play key roles in aligning ecological restoration with economic growth.

8. The forum concluded with a compelling call to action from Ms. Éliane Ubalijoro, Mr. Philippe Zaouati, Ms. Andrea Meza Murillo and Mr. Kevin Tayebali, urging the private sector to step up its commitment to ecosystem health and sustainable land, soil and water management. Dr. Ubalijoro highlighted the urgent need for investments that go beyond carbon to include water replenishment, ecosystems and the communities they sustain. She advocated scaling up equitable, science-informed forestry investments to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Mr. Zaouati emphasized the vital role of private financing in addressing environmental challenges, and announced the launch of the Sustainable Land Fund II, urging greater financial sector engagement in land degradation neutrality initiatives. The forum culminated with a unified call for private sector entities to actively participate in sustainable land, soil and water restoration efforts through the Business for Land Initiative.

Speakers in the main event:

1. H.E. Abdulrahman Abdulmohsen Al-Fadley, Minister of Environment, Water and Agriculture of Saudi Arabia, COP 16 President
2. H.E. Dr. Osama Ibrahim Faqeeha, Deputy Minister of Environment of the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture of Saudi Arabia, Advisor to the COP 16 President
3. Ibrahim Thiaw, Executive Secretary, UNCCD
4. André Hoffmann, member of the High-Level Advisory Committee of COP 16 and Vice-Chairman of the Board of Directors, Roche Holding
5. Gim Huay Neo, Managing Director, Centre for Nature and Climate, World Economic Forum
6. Erin Billman, Executive Director, Science Based Targets Network
7. Juliano Salgado, President and filmmaker, Instituto Terra
8. Laurène Aubert, Expert and author of the Business for Land report titled “Corporate disclosures and target-setting on land guide”
9. Diane Holdorf, Executive Vice President, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development
10. Henri Bruxelles, Chief Sustainability and Strategic Business Development Officer, Danone
11. Paul Luu, Executive Secretary, International “4 per 1000” Initiative
12. John Giusti, Chief Regulatory Officer, Global System for Mobile Communications Association (GSMA) and President of the GSMA Foundation
13. Adrienne de Malleray, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Genesis Soil Health

14. Abdulrahman Ghassan Alshibl, General Manager, Saudi Desert Control
15. Shuyuan Zhang, Director of Sustainable Development, China Shengmu
16. Sandrine Sommer, Chief Sustainability Officer, Moët Hennessy
17. Philippe Zaouati, CEO, Mirova
18. Dr. Hamed Beheshti, CEO and Co-founder, Boreal Light GmbH
19. Marina Negrisoni, Director of Sustainability, Suzano
20. Éliane Ubalijoro, CEO, Center for International Forestry Research and World Agroforestry (CIFOR-ICRAF)
21. Andrea Meza Murillo, Deputy Executive Secretary, UNCCD

Moderators:

1. Kevin Tayebaly, Co-founder of ChangeNOW
2. Becky Anderson, Journalist and CNN International Anchor

Annex VI

[English Only]

Sacred Lands Indigenous Peoples Declaration at the UNCCD COP 16, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

**Presented on People's Day
High-Level Event, Indigenous Peoples for Land
December 7, 2024, 10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m., MET-33**

1. It has been thirty-one years since the 1992 United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development that led to the creation of the sister conventions: the Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), and the Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). These conventions were meant to address the issues of climate change, biodiversity loss, and desertification, drought, and land degradation, but we are not any nearer to the resolution of these problems. We continue to experience the crises brought about by over-consumption and disregard for nature.

2. Here at UNCCD COP16, we acknowledge the support of the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the UNCCD Secretariat in bringing together—for the first time—Indigenous Peoples' representatives from Africa; the Arctic; Asia; Central and South America and the Caribbean; Eastern Europe, Russian Federation, Central Asia and Transcaucasia; North America; and the Pacific.

RESPECT, RECOGNIZE, PROMOTE AND PROTECT INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS IN THE UNCCD POLICIES AND ACTIONS

3. We call on Parties to ensure an approach that embraces human rights and Indigenous Peoples' rights in all policies and actions related to land restoration and resilience building. We call on Parties to respect, recognize, promote, and protect Indigenous Peoples' rights, based on the fundamental right to self-determination, provided for in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and its General Recommendation 23. Indigenous Peoples' lands and territorial rights, tenure systems, and governance need to be recognized and upheld. Indigenous Peoples' abilities to manage their lands and territories should be maintained and enhanced in all UNCCD policies and actions, including recognition and support for Indigenous Peoples' collective actions and efforts related to the restoration of degraded lands and conservation of our lands and territories.

ENSURE FULL AND EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, INCLUDING WOMEN AND YOUTH, IN LAND-RELATED PROCESSES AND PROGRAMS AT THE LOCAL, NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS

4. Indigenous Peoples' lands and territories are on the frontline of environmental crises, including land desertification, drought and degradation. The full engagement of Indigenous Peoples is critical to the success of the UNCCD. We urge Parties to establish an Indigenous Peoples Caucus within the UNCCD at COP16, as rightsholders, distinct from the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). In keeping with established norms within the United Nations, the creation of a distinct caucus will create a meaningful space to exchange knowledge amongst ourselves and enable us to more effectively advise the UNCCD. This will bring the UNCCD in line with other UN fora, including the sister conventions, the General Assembly resolution 71/321, and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

RECOGNIZE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS AND POSITIVE CONTRIBUTIONS TO LAND RESTORATION, STEWARDSHIP, AND TRADITIONAL LIVELIHOODS

5. There is no doubt that Indigenous Peoples have unique knowledge systems and livelihoods arising from our ancestral connections and close ties with our lands and territories. This knowledge is a valuable source of feasible solutions that can contribute to the effective implementation of the UNCCD. We call for the equitable and ethical inclusion of Indigenous Peoples' knowledge, science and technologies, values, practices, and innovations in the decisions of the UNCCD COP16. We urge Parties to provide a permanent seat for Indigenous Peoples on the Committee on Science and Technology.

ENSURE DIRECT ACCESS TO FINANCES FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES FROM ALL SEVEN SOCIO-CULTURAL REGIONS

6. We stress the need to directly fund the self-determined actions of Indigenous Peoples with regards to protecting and restoring lands and territories. We advocate for the inclusion of the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples in decision making about the UNCCD funds and financial mechanisms and provide for direct access to resources without relying on intermediaries. The funding mechanisms should be equitable, non-discriminatory, accessible, flexible, and responsive to priorities across all socio-cultural regions without political impediments. We urge Parties to support our request for the representation of Indigenous Peoples as active observers on the Riyadh Action Agenda and Riyadh Drought Resilience Partnership Fund. We encourage the UNCCD to create a dedicated fund for Indigenous Peoples' initiatives on land restoration, conservation, and desertification and drought resilience.

7. We offer our strong appreciation to the COP Presidency and Secretariat for their commitment to Indigenous Caucus members. We call on other Parties and upcoming COP President to also extend their support in forthcoming meetings. We remain committed to working with the Parties as full partners and trust our contributions bring benefit for all. We remind everyone that, without the full recognition of Indigenous Peoples' rights and to the matters set out in this Declaration, the goals of the Convention will ultimately not be achieved. Therefore, we count on you to uphold our rights.

8. Shukran! Thank you! Merci! Gracias! Спасибо! 谢谢 (Xièxie)!

9. In a few of our Indigenous languages: Ousseko! Mingetti! Ondjarama! Miigwetch! Wophila Tanka! Kurang! Ikatu Nekopoe! Hahom! Soro Nyo Wogh! Matiox! Doggus Nued! Nga Mihi Nui! Ashe Naleng! Kotoluadan! Salamats! Tyoox Tii! Khop Khun kha! Sepas! Saqol! Morī pe! Molyii! Tat fa kup! Maketai! Spasibo! Jaan byiyan! Eyde polzyyn! Nugen! Min yetti! Alatsüking!

Annex VII

[English Only]

Report from the Gender Caucus

Background

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Gender Caucus held three sessions at the sixteenth session of the Conference of Parties (COP 16) in Riyadh. The high-level event took place on 4 December and was chaired by HE Ms. Tarja Halonen, UNCCD Land Ambassador and former President of Finland. Two other sessions, which focused on (1) emerging best practices on the collection of sex-disaggregated data and gender-responsive indicators for DLDD; and (2) women-led solutions for drought resilience, were held on 7 December. The Caucus aimed to highlight and consider how to measure women's unique and valuable contributions to combatting drought, land restoration and managing sustainable land and food systems. The three sessions built on previous COP decisions and CRIC recommendations, and in that way contribute to implementation of the Gender Action Plan (GAP) approved by the Parties and its Roadmap.

More than 540 participants (68 per cent women), including country Party delegates and representatives of international agencies, civil society organizations (CSOs), the media and youth organizations, were present at the Gender Caucus events. Several high-level officials also attended, including the United Nations Envoy on Water, the President of IUCN, the President of IFAD, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and Princess Mashael bint Saud Al-Shalan of Saudi Arabia.

Session 1: High Level Interactive Dialogue of the Gender Caucus: HerLand: Women's Leadership for Sustainable Land Management

This session featured a high-level panels of keynote speakers, a multimedia segment, and an interactive dialogue. Various policymakers and experts in the field of gender equality and land-related issues shared their statements and experiences. At the opening of the High Level Interactive Dialogue of the Gender Caucus, **Ms. Tarja Halonen, former President of Finland and UNCCD Land Ambassador**, noted that Gender equality is a critical necessity for conserving our planet and conserving our natural resources for generations. She indicated that women in rural areas face poverty and great hardships. She also noted that secure access to land is a catalyst which enhances the potential of women to invest in sustainable practices that benefit communities.

The COP President delegated **Mr. Mansour bin Hilal Al Mushaiti, Deputy Minister of Environment, Water and Agriculture (MEWA)**, to represent him at this high-level event. He stated that all members of society should contribute to sustainable development. The Deputy Minister also indicated that desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) are some of the most important threats we are facing, impacting 40% of the earth's land area. Women play an important role in addressing food insecurity, sustainable management and combating DLDD, therefore promoting gender diversity and the full empowerment of women will have an impact on SLM and will preserve ecosystems, and build societies and capacities for sustainable development. Accordingly, the Saudi 2030 Vision includes "working to promote women's rights and enhancing participation at all levels."

Next, **Mr. Ibrahim Thiaw, Executive Secretary of UNCCD**, welcomed all the participants and high-level officials to the event and expressed his gratitude to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for hosting the first COP held in the Middle East region, occurring in the same year as the UNCCD's 30th anniversary. He noted that when we speak of women, girls and children, we are talking about inequalities and vulnerabilities. He shared that "women produce up to 80% of food in developing countries, but only own 13% of agricultural land. There is no more shocking inequality in the world." The economic benefits of women's land rights are enormous, there must be tenure security to ensure investments. He declared "we need to

rebalance land ownership in the world.” The Executive Secretary announced that UNCCD has recently released a report on how women react to drought in the world. <https://www.unccd.int/resources/publications/women-led-solutions-drought-resilience>.

Women are vibrant entrepreneurs that try to reduce impact of drought to protect the people and humanity. The 35 case studies featured in the report demonstrate how women are driving progress and building resilience to drought through innovative approaches. A policy brief recently published by UNICEF reveals how children are disproportionately affected by DLDD, and that 1 in 4 children suffer from malnutrition due to DLDD. Finally the Executive Secretary noted that “we must focus on women, girls and children, their vulnerabilities are our vulnerabilities. No hand is too small to take action.”

A keynote speech was delivered by **Dr Maimoonah Alkhalil, Secretary-General of the Family Affairs Council of Saudi Arabia**. She pointed out that Saudi’s Vision 2030 aligns with SDG5 and SDG 2. Women’s land rights must be promoted to ensure food security. Saudi Arabia has launched a rural development programme, in which women have property rights and equal participation rights. A total of 70,000 individuals benefit from the programme, including 36,000 women, and it is the first programme for women to acquire green skills. She emphasised KSA’s commitment to collaboration to ensure women’s full engagement, by leading the Commission on Status of Women.

In representation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, **Her Royal Highness Princess Mashaal bint Saud Al-Shalan** also joined the keynote speakers at the podium.

A keynote speech was delivered by **Ms. Razan Al Mubarak, President of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)**. She noted milestone advances in gender equality in reached at the other two COPs this year. Ms. Al Mubarak stated, “we need to remove the invisibility cloak on gender action and look at how women are impacted and what they are doing collectively to enhance action. Gender is instrumental to environmental action because the people least responsible are the most resilient and resourceful.” She observed that women leading environmental ministries is slowing down, and would require another 126 years to have equal numbers of women in environmental leadership in environmental ministries. She asserted that gender equality is a prerequisite for a sustainable planet, and we need to remove barriers to allow women and girls to thrive.

Next, HE **Ms. Imaan Sulaiman-Ibrahim, Minister of Women Affairs from Nigeria**, revealed that Nigeria feels the impact of DLDD in form of poverty and insecurity. Climate change intersects with conflicts leading people to flee homes, and 80% of women displaced often face sexual violence, worse healthcare and poverty. She asserted that we must invest in women while adapting to a just transition. Women in climate action are a catalyst for resilience, and they need platforms and tools to participate and drive solutions that are required to meet international goals. Investing in women is always a sound investment: With access to credit and finance, capacity building, they can build community resilience. **Mr. Alvaro Lario, President of IFAD**, asserted that women currently don’t have the opportunities they deserve. When women have access to land and household income, decisions of communities change considerably with massive social returns. If women had equal opportunities, farm yields would increase by 1/3, and hunger would be reduced by 1/5. Requires long-term investments, to put women in leadership roles, and changes at the community level through legal reforms. The cost of not doing so means that the family loses critical income and children lose out on education and food.

Next, **Ms. Retno Marsudi, UN Special Envoy on Water**, shared that the world has lost at least 100 million hectares of land every year since 2015, and that soil degradation has affected 3.2 billion people worldwide. These burdens are unevenly distributed, with women and girls experiencing economic hardships. Girls are dropping out of schools or being forced into early marriage. She asserted that we need a radical paradigm shift: to address women’s rights, and also ensure that women are agents of change in land management. We must spread the good story and celebrate women’s leadership. We should acknowledge that there is progress, there is now more recognition of women in water management.

Ms. Neema Lugangira, Member of Parliament Tanzania, revealed that 80% of food produced globally is produced by smallholders, of that 70-80% of smallholders are women. Women play a key role in land restoration, recognise the traditional methods. However, the

way in which women are engaged in policies and programmes is not the same, we need to address some of these bottlenecks. The bottlenecks all boil down to policies and legislative frameworks. We need reforms that ease barriers in accessing land, agricultural inputs, education, credit, and equal pay. Bottlenecks all boil down to policies and legislative frameworks. We need reforms that eases barriers in accessing land, agricultural inputs, education, credit, and equal pay. She recommended that UNCCD and others closely engage with parliamentarians, through existing parliamentary networks, or by establishing a separate network.

HE Mrs. Odontuya Saldan, Minister of Environment and Climate Change from Mongolia, pointed out that we must integrate gender equality into environmental and land management policies. Education is the foundation for change, and empower all genders to manage resources and adapt to climate challenges. Gender equality is not just a goal, it is the key to LDN and stronger communities. Mongolia will host UNCCD COP17, and is leading the Global Coalition for Future Rangelands and Grasslands, which focuses on gender equality and youth. They have also initiated an Environmental Female Leaders Group.

A keynote speech was also made by **Ms. Astrid Schomaker (CBD), Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**. She urged that we need to end siloed interventions. Land is the most critical economic resource for most rural people, and the lack of ownership exposes women around the world to poverty, gender-based violence, displacement, and land grabbing. It is a simple fact that we have just 5 years to achieve SDGs, so half of humanity must be empowered to contribute. Women that own land take better care of families and communities, and these land empowered women are also more likely to engage in SLM. Women have long been stewards of the environment. They are the custodians of natural resources and contribute considerably if we only let them.

The next keynote intervention was made by **Mr. Thani Mohamed-Soihili, Secretary of State, Francophonie and Partnerships, of France**. He noted that women are disproportionately affected by drought and primarily responsible for collecting water, which endangers their health and safety. France has a feminist foreign policy, and in a few days will launch a strategy for feminist diplomacy. Women need full and meaningful participation including in all three Rio Convention negotiations. They are not just beneficiaries, but fully fledged participants and leaders. In reinforcing women's rights, we reinforce community resilience.

Ms. Mira Lee, Deputy Minister, Korea Forest Service, announced that the Republic of Korea has achieved successful restoration of a forest ,bringing multiple benefits. In the process, women played a crucial role in participating in tree planning and land management supporting their livelihoods. Confucian practices previously limited women's participation and access to education, and new policies were required to promote women's engagement in the labour market. Governments must take the lead in taking gender responsive policies, promote programmes that provide equal access, and public campaigns to sway traditional beliefs and enhance participation.

A keynote was also offered by **Ms. Fatimata Cheiffou, Ambassador of Niger to Italy**. She asserted that DLDD poses not just environmental challenges, but also existential threats. Women across the globe are at the forefront of innovative solutions to land degradation, and they need seed funding, access to decision-making spaces, equitable access to resources and land ownership for women. We must scale up investments, and involve women more in governance processes. We must ensure tangible actions and make this a turning point. She expressed, "to rural women in Africa and all over the world, you are the beating heart of our communities."

The multi-media segment followed. **Ms. Inna Modja, UNCCD Goodwill Ambassador**, introduced and showed a premiere of new film on women's land rights, as part of the HerLand campaign. She called on those present endorse HerLand campaign Call to Action, to raise visibility of the urgent need to expand women's land rights. As associated book featuring essays and photos advocating for women's land right, was gifted to those in attendance,

Interactive Dialogue segment

The floor was opened to Ministers and Heads of Delegation, to provide a statement based on the following guiding questions:

(a) Which strategic resources is your country making available to women, to empower them to be more effective in sustainable land management, and in addressing drought, land degradation and desertification?

(b) Which innovative policies and actions are being undertaken in your country, to enable women's leadership toward building resilience?

(c) Which policy gaps or bottlenecks have been identified, and how are these being overcome?

Brief statements were read by Heads of Delegations from Guinea, Canada, Spain, European Union, United Arab Emirates, Brazil, Bangladesh, Benin and Guatemala. Statements were also provided by UN agencies including UNEP, UNDP, UN Women, IOM, UNICEF and also by Green Climate Fund (GCF).

The **UNDP** representative noted that accelerating progress to gender equality is a prerequisite for sustainable development and a lever for all interlinked goals. UNDP prioritises integrated approaches, for more effective and efficient environmental projects, which are helping to close gender gaps in 93 countries. The Climate Promise initiative is under way in 73 countries.

The **Guinea** representative recognised that women play an indispensable role in building resilience. Women must be given access to financing and training, capacity building and skills, and land tenure reforms must be enacted to enhance access to secure land tenure in partnership with local authorities to ensure that this aligns with local customs. Women are showing leadership in SLM through community-led restoration initiatives, and integrated water and soil management projects. There is a national gender strategy that integrates women's voices into decision-making at all levels. Challenges include policy gaps, the need to strengthen legislative frameworks, and cultural and social norms. Awareness campaigns must be conducted among traditional leaders, and partnerships built to mobilise resources.

The representative of **Canada** asserted that gender equality is a non-negotiable fundamental human right. Through its feminist international assistance policy, Canada prioritizes the empowerment of women for peace, prosperity and sustainable development. Global efforts to roll back these rights is concerning. Women comprise half of population and work force, and there is a gender wage gap in agriculture, and closing this gap could considerably increase global production and reduce food insecurity. We cannot achieve LDN without gender equality, and women are still not properly included at the table on topics around SLM. Canada has provided 6 million dollars to support the UNCCD Gender Action Plan and Roadmap.

The **Spain** representative noted that DLDD affects millions of hectares, which are not distributed evenly due to structural inequalities. The primary sector is strongly masculinised at all levels, and gender should be mainstreamed as a cross-cutting issue. Women represent 1/3 of people working on farms, but only the men are owners. To address this invisibility, Spain has developed a law that regulates land ownership. Work is under way with the Ministry of Gender Equality to implement impact assessments and develop indicators. Spain is a leading country in female rural entrepreneurship, and globally there is a need to overcome structural barriers in public policies and support female entrepreneurs.

The **UNEP** representative revealed that women make up 70% of the world's hungry - this is a systemic failure. When there is equal access to land, the land thrives and gender equality is essential for SLM and reversing land degradation. When female leadership is embraced, communities flourish. Empowering women in decision-making can improve education, nutrition and health outcomes. Decisions at this COP will outline what needs to be done before we meet again in two years. We must strengthen collaboration under the Rio Conventions to expand women's land rights.

The **European Union** representative noted that equal participation and leadership of women in public and political life is crucial for achieving the SDGs. The EU has a Gender Action Plan, which supports attendance of women to COPs. EU is a major contributor to multi-donor

initiatives, working together with international finance institutions. Women are driving the shift to more climate resilient ecosystems. There is a great need for equal access to resources: land, credit, and farming technologies. The UNCCD should continue supporting WOCAT, as an essential source of gender data.

The representative of **UN Women** observed that SLM is essential to address environmental issues that heavily impact women and girls, who gather resources for daily energy sources and food. Walk greater distances to collect water increasing amount of time spent on domestic care. Gender inequalities are systemic, with 236 million expected to go hungry. The UNCCD research report reminds us that women undertake SLM in all their diversity. It is now the 30th Anniversary of Beijing Declaration, which refers to the importance of women's equal participation in environmental decision-making and requires their meaningful engagement. We should acknowledge the diversity of women working towards SLM. Participants were urged to follow UN Women's past work on women's land rights and the new paper that will be launched at COP16.

The **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** representative noted that both men and women are impacted by DLDD. There is an opportunity to promote efforts to combat DLDD and increase the role of women and girls in this area through knowledge and skills. UAE is working to promote more sustainable land management and gender equality, and transformation of food systems. The country is building women's capacity through various programmes including engaging refugees along with UNHCR, and through smart agricultural practices, and urbanisation initiatives. There is a need for more opportunities for women and girls to participate.

The **UNICEF** representative asserted that women are agents of change and innovation, and mobilize the power of local knowledge and creativity. Barriers include land tenure, access to resources, and participation in decision-making. Opportunities include investing in women's capacities through equitable access to financial services, education and technology; gender responsive policies; gender responsive budgeting to ensure allocated resources; and advancing women's and girls' representation at local, national and international levels.

The representative from **Brazil** noted that the country is facing challenges that require climate justice, inclusive leadership and gender equality. Brazil is undertaking programmes with women as 70% of beneficiaries, and is formulating programme to defend human rights defenders. In Brazil women are the guardians of water, food security, and community development, but are also the main victims of violence. Barriers persist, for example men earn 20% more than women, so the country is moving forward with a decree for equal pay and equality in fiscal policies to overcome the paradigms of inequality. Gender is a transversal issue in adaptation and mitigation plans. Brazil noted that it is important to fight underrepresentation in important areas of society, promote land rights and rights of LGBTQ+. There is a need for effective actions to ensure inclusion.

The **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** representative stated that they are proud to speak on the topic of women's rights. DLDD is one of the adverse drivers of migration, and women are facing multiple crises such as conflict, difficult economic situations, and DLDD. IOM has a policy brief on climate mobility, with a focus on women and girls, and which showcases the power of women and their capacities to adapt to climate change and DLDD. Women as agents of change are at the centre of IOM's actions, in line with the 2024 Gender Policy. IOM is promoting women's water user groups, and is strengthening women's capacity for peace building and conflict resolution, and is engaging women in climate mobility innovation labs. IOM calls on UNCCD parties to recognise the role of migrant women in decisions taken.

The representative from **Green Climate Fund (GCF)** noted that event with the most effective mechanisms for low emission climate resilient and inclusive future, significant gender gaps remain, and differentiated impacts on women and men. Greater upfront investments are needed, and women should be at centre of adaptation and mitigation efforts. There are missed opportunities and gender risks for most climate priorities. GCF supports the Action Coalition for Feminist Action for Climate Justice, which is the first climate finance mechanism to mainstream gender from the outset. Requires project proponents to assess differentiated gender opportunities, and develop a Gender Action Plan with performance indicators. GCF

has a rich database of gender analyses, and over 180 million women are benefitting from GCF projects.

The representative from **Bangladesh** explained that it is a small and low-lying country with 170 million people, so is a living laboratory for all climate adversities. Bangladesh has provided 3.5 million landless people with new houses, given to both men and women, which is a unique opportunity to create land ownership. The country has the largest mangrove forests in the world, and one designated channel is given to female-headed households for harvesting and fisheries. Male members of community migrated to urban areas due to drought. Women innovating with the help of agricultural extension services, and access to science and information is crucial for women.

The **Benin** representative noted that women as the remain the poor parent of the continent. Their access to land is low and insignificant, but they consider land as their mother earth, feeding families, and women's production contributes to food security. They restore land although they do not have resources. We need concrete decisions to support these brave women, we no longer need to prove that women are important, we need to support them. We must think about how their rights are violated in terms of access to land, and how due to migration women are left to their own devices.

The representative from **Guatemala** stated that mainstreaming of gender into policy is important. Guatemala has natural and cultural diversity, and women play a key role in managing natural resources. Women work daily to guarantee food security, and they face the greatest challenges due to structural inequality and disproportionate impacts of climate change and DLDD. There is a long way to go for Guatemala to recognise the role of women, who have limited participation. Data shows that 60% of women had to change farm activities due to land degradation and lack of water. Migration affects women, as they are left solely in charge of the family, so human mobility must be considered as part of adaptation strategies.

Due to lack of time, Parties that had expressed an interest to read a statement but were not allocated time to do so included Australia, South Africa, Türkiye, and also UN agency UN Habitat.

Closing of session

Closing remarks were offered by **Ms. Tarja Halonen, former President of Finland and UNCCD Land Ambassador**, who noted that empowering women and girls is not just about justice for them—it is also about justice for our troubled planet. Addressing these injustices simultaneously is essential for building a future that is fair, resilient, and sustainable for all. She urged each person to take this conversation beyond this room and to consider exercising their influence by supporting the Call to Action of the HerLand campaign led by UNCCD. Ms. Halonen declared, “let your policies, your investments, and your actions reflect the undeniable truth: gender equality is the cornerstone of sustainable development. Together, we can create a world where gender equality supports the health of our planet and upholds the dignity of all people.”

Additional closing remarks were made by the **Mr. Mansour bin Hilal Al Mushaiti, Deputy Minister from Saudi Arabia**. He observed that the key for success lies in socio-economic research, and inclusion of women to restore our land and achieve LDN. Women must also play a key role in the other two Rio Conventions. Women are our grandmothers, mothers and wives. He declared, “our prophet said to listen to women, because you will find good, and recommended to take care of women and give them their full rights.” The Deputy Minister asserted that we need to give back to women the role they played from the start, and act in partnership against drought.

The multi-media segment resumed, with a showing of the music video featuring the HerLand theme song, followed by an *a capella* performance of the song by **UNCCD Goodwill Ambassador Baaba Maal**.

Session 2: Emerging best practices on the collection of sex-disaggregated data and gender-responsive indicators for DLDD

This purpose of this session was to share some examples of best practices in data-based gender-responsive indicators, building on a recommendation from CRIC21, to consider and to pave the way for the UNCCD process of refining its indicators for the next strategic framework.

Best practice examples were presented by technical experts from UNDP, UN Women, WOCAT, GEF, International Land Coalition, National Observatory for Women of Saudi Arabia, and the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Moderated by **María Degania Medina Vidal**, Policy Officer – Desertification and Land Degradation, Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge, Government of Spain, the **first session discussed the issue of emerging best practices in the collection of sex-disaggregated data and gender-responsive indicators for DLDD initiatives.**

All keynote speakers concurred that sex-disaggregated data and gender-responsive indicators are necessity for developing effective, sustainable solutions to drought, desertification, and land degradation.

In his keynote address, **Ambassador Peter Huber**, Director General for Austrian Development Policy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, highlighted the importance of sex-disaggregated data and indicator. At the project level in particular, sex-disaggregated and meaningful indicators are essential to avoid misinterpretation and to ensure accuracy and relevance. In many communities, men and women have different roles in managing land, water and natural resources. Understanding these gendered experiences through data ensures that the outcomes of interventions are tailored to the needs of all community members, promoting resilience and sustainable practices. Proper data collection and the development of meaningful indicators require stakeholder involvement, capacity building of data collectors, adequate funding and continuous learning.

Ms. Camilla Steinboeck, Research Scientist, WOCAT, presented the tool to assess gender-responsiveness of SLM practices, developed by WOCAT together with gender and SLM experts. This tool uses a questionnaire to identify gender-related parameters, as well as technical and socio-cultural factors, that promote the adoption of SLM by both women and men. The aim of the tool is to apply a gender lens to SLM technologies and approaches and to assess their gender-responsiveness, and to assess how the gender-responsiveness of SLM technologies and approaches can be improved to enhance their adoption and dissemination, so that SLM benefits women and men alike. Recently, the tool went live on the [WOCAT website](#).

On the issue on unpacking gender and environment data: its production and application, **Ms. Sara Duerto Valero**, Regional Advisor on Gender Statistics, UN-Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, highlighted the power of data to show gender differences in natural resource management, including disparities between arid and humid areas. She also presented available data collection tools and resources, such as "100 indicators on gender and environment", gender-centered survey tools, data integration tools for geospatial and survey data, and gender and environment data resources.

The ensuing panel discussion highlighted several issues related to gender data and indicators.

Ms. Ciara Daniels, Policy Specialist, Gender and Environmental Finance, UNDP, reported on programming solutions and indicators for gender equality and restoration, highlighting the importance of gender data and indicators throughout the project cycle at the project level. Some of the key takeaways were that successful projects prioritize gender equality as part of restoration projects, supporting women's groups can have a huge impact on the success of projects, gender expertise multi-stakeholder partnerships and holistic and inclusive approaches contribute to better outcomes in areas such as resource management, disaster preparedness and restoration projects.

Mr. Ward Anseeuw, Land Tenure Lead, FAO, presented the experience to date with gender-disaggregated data from SDG indicators 5.a.1 and 5.a.2. He noted that there has been notable

progress in collecting data on gender and land rights, thanks to significant efforts by governments and custodians. The data show that achieving gender equality in ownership and secure rights to agricultural land remains a challenge in most countries. In addition, there is a notable gap between women's and men's ownership of agricultural land, with men at least twice as likely as women to own land in almost half of the countries, highlighting that even with legal recognition, the gender gap in agricultural land ownership remains high.

Ms. Cristina Timponi Cambiagli, Senior Global Policy and Advocacy Specialist, International Land (ILC) explained that ILC facilitates the centralization and collection of land data using the core indicators of LANDex, the global land governance index. ILC works closely with its members to use this data for accountability and against multiple frameworks - the SDGs, CEDAW and more recently across the Rio Conventions, including the CBD and UNCCD. She notes that women and men often respond very differently to questions, so disaggregating data at all levels is important.

Ms. Alla Ljungman, from the Policy, Partnerships and Operations Unit, Global Environment Facility (GEF), shared the GEF's perspective on gender equality, emphasizing that gender and the environment are mutually supportive and have multiple co-benefits. For the GEF, gender equality must be at the heart of GEF-funded interventions. In terms of implementing SLM projects, some of the key success factors are: a) conducting gender analysis to inform project design, b) working closely with communities - both women and men - at all stages of the project, c) need for a gender expert to lead the project team, d) guidance, tools needed, e) monitoring progress and capturing lessons learned, f) facilitating dialogue and learning on gender, building partnerships with women's organizations, including indigenous women and men, local groups, g) adjusting/adapting along the way.

Dr. Abir Alharbi, Head of Scientific Committee from the National Observatory for Women, Saudi Arabia, provided an overview of the new Women's Environmental and Climate Participation Index (methodology and design). The WEC Index measures women's participation in environment and climate issues to ensure preparedness for the world's environment/climate challenges and is structured around 4 pillars: 1) economy and business; 2) legislation and international cooperation; 3) education, research and training; and 4) social awareness, participation and access. Its aim is to provide reliable results and support sound planning in participating countries to preserve the environment and climate conditions, with clear participation of women and recognition of their vital role for a sustainable future.

In their interventions and comments, participants highlighted that while data and related tools are of paramount importance, it is difficult to identify which tool provides the best data, how to choose the right tool and how data collected on the ground can help policy makers in their policy making. Another participant highlighted the issue of the digital divide between women and men. In response, panelists acknowledged that the variety of tools is confusing, but also stressed that tools serve different purposes and should be selected according to the specific context, i.e. for project level interventions or for national use, i.e. for national statistical offices. FAO mentioned the Global Land Observatory, which aims to bring together land data generation/monitoring initiatives and make them visible and usable to strengthen policy engagement on land tenure and governance. Regarding the digital divide between women and men, there was consensus on the urgent need to bridge this gap in order to enable women to benefit from technological progress.

Session 3: Women-led solutions for drought resilience and adaptation: key findings, and conversation with selected country-based women champions

The purpose of this session was to present the key findings of a new research study commissioned by UNCCD and FAO to detect and highlight the most innovative and effective examples of women champions tackling drought in all corners of the world, and to share the perspectives from the women leaders themselves.

Opening remarks were provided by **Ms. Andrea Meza**, Deputy Executive Secretary of UNCCD, and

by **Mr. Fritjof Boerstler**, Senior Forestry Officer and GEF-7 Impact Programs Global Coordinator, FAO.

In her opening remarks, **Ms. Andrea Meza**, Deputy Executive Secretary of the UNCCD, acknowledged the crucial role of women and girls in fostering resilience at the individual, familial, and community levels. It is vital to recognize and reinforce the leadership abilities of women, who are often best placed to provide sustainable solutions. This view was echoed by **Mr. Fritjof Boerstler**, Senior Forestry Officer and GEF-7 Impact Programmes Global Coordinator at the FAO, who highlighted the need for a more integrated approach to implementing solutions. To achieve this, a programmatic approach that incorporates the input of those working at the field level is essential.

The keynote speaker was **Ms. Lorena Aguilar**, senior international gender expert, and Executive Director of the Kaschak Institute for Social Justice for Women and Girls. As the researcher who prepared the report, she gave an overview of the key findings of UNCCD's new research study on women-led solutions for drought resilience, jointly produced by UNCCD and FAO. Ms. Aguilar explained that women and girls are disproportionately affected by drought due to persistent structural gender inequalities that limit their access to essential resources such as land, water, and financial services. These inequalities also place formidable workloads on women and girls. However, in addition to being the most impacted by drought due to pervasive and structural gender inequalities, at the same time many women are exercising leadership and resourcefulness in undertaking actions to adapt to drought and increase drought resilience in their communities. It is imperative to also document and highlight illustrative examples of this leadership and creativity, to balance the narrative which details how women are impacted by drought. She highlighted the infeasibility of excluding half of the population in the pursuit of sustainable solutions to combat desertification and drought. She also emphasized the necessity of secure land rights for achieving gender equality and resilience to land degradation and drought.

In the subsequent talk with women champions from selected case studies, all highlighted the difficulties faced by communities struggling with desertification, land degradation, drought and water scarcity. There was a broad consensus that sustainable solutions are available and urgently needed to preserve valuable ecosystems and community life. For example, **Dr. Tayebeh Mesbahzadeh, from the University of Tehran in Iran**, reported on the struggle of people in the arid and semi-arid regions of Iran to cope with the multiple challenges posed by the drying up of Lake Urmia in Iran. To address this challenge, she emphasized the importance of science and research. Throughout her career as a researcher, Dr. Mesbahzadeh has fought against desertification and championed the cause of women's empowerment in land management. She emphasized the need to invest in women in all forms to combat DLDD.

All of the women champions stressed that women's involvement in land restoration and sustainable land management is crucial to creating a more resilient and equitable world. In many regions, particularly in rural and farming communities, women are the primary custodians of natural resources such as soil and water. In this context, the promotion and application of agricultural knowledge and techniques is also crucial, as **Ms. Magdalena Machaca Mendieta of the Asociación Bartolomé Aripaylla in Peru** pointed out, stressing that water is life and should not be managed but celebrated. Her story is a true success story of women's empowerment and leadership. In the central Andes of Peru, the Machaca Mendieta sisters moved from the countryside to the city to study agricultural engineering, a traditionally male profession. They faced discrimination because of their background, but they never gave up. They returned to their farming community, but instead of applying what they had learned at the academy, they immersed themselves in the knowledge of their ancestors, enriched their relationship with nature and, thanks to them, their community had water again - proving that women's knowledge of local ecosystems, passed down through generations of traditional practices, provides them with unique insights into sustainable land use and conservation strategies.

The champions also reiterated that when women receive proper training and support, they can outperform their male counterparts in implementing land restoration and sustainable agriculture techniques. **Ms. Wissal ben Moussa of Sand to Green in Morocco**, for example stated that while women were not initially involved in the initiative, she realized that women were the backbone of the rural area, but lacked capacity and knowledge. Sand to Green began working with the women, providing capacity building and training. As a result, she noticed women often act as catalysts for change when given the tools and platforms to do so.

Programmes that provide training in sustainable agriculture, agroforestry and environmentally friendly land management techniques have shown that women can lead successful projects that rehabilitate land and increase its productivity.

Community-based approaches with women at the forefront are also a key success factor, said **Ms. Trupti Jain of the Bhungroo Initiative in India**. The initiative builds on this particular strength by empowering women to lead the implementation and management of Bhungroo systems through self-help groups and initiatives. This empowers them economically and increases their resilience to climate change, while overcoming cultural barriers that can hinder male cooperation.

Ms. Deisy Garcia Perez from GACEM (Savings and Credit Groups for Women's Empowerment) in Guatemala said that women's involvement in sustainable land management has far-reaching economic benefits. Empowered women are better able to contribute to the local economy by producing surplus crops, selling products, and engaging in entrepreneurship that further supports sustainable practices. She stressed that knowledge, exchange and learning from each other are key to development.

Ms. Rita Otu, from Radio FANTASEE in Nigeria, mentioned that women farmers, in particular, are marginalized and lack access to necessary knowledge and information, perpetuating their poverty and vulnerability. She underscored that women are eager to improve food security and conserve land and soils however, without access to up-to-date agricultural knowledge, training, and resources, their potential to rehabilitate degraded land and improve productivity is severely limited. The Food and Nutrition on Air (Radio FANTASEE) initiative addresses these issues using community radio to disseminate practical information to remote communities. Through interviews with local farmers, experts, and supply chain partners, the programme shares knowledge on climate-smart practices, water conservation, irrigation technologies, and climate information services. The project has reached approximately 200,000 women, half of whom have implemented climate-smart practices which they learned from the radio. Nearly 40 per cent of women listeners reported trying at least one climate change adaptive practice as a result of the programme, highlighting its effectiveness in promoting resilience and reducing vulnerability to food insecurity in rural communities.

Annex VIII

[English Only]

Declaration of civil society organizations attending the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties

Civil Society Organisations stand united in urging ambitious and inclusive action to tackle desertification, land degradation, and drought.

This COP takes place at a pivotal moment when the global community faces severe and interlinked challenges of land degradation, desertification, biodiversity loss and climate change exacerbated by conflicts. These issues disproportionately affect women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, pastoralists and local communities, who, despite facing these hardships, remain a vital source of transformative solutions.

The meaningful inclusion of all rights holders -women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities- is essential to shaping policies that effectively advance sustainable land management and restoration.

Today, we have **a series of key demands:**

First, we reiterate our key messages for COP16:

Key message 1

Secure and support meaningful inclusion of women, youth, local communities, pastoralist communities and Indigenous Peoples into decision-making for policy development, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting at national, subnational and local levels through local and national multi-stakeholder platform dialogues and consultation as their experience, knowledge, perceptions and solutions are vital for the effective implementation of the UNCCD and decision-making regarding LDN, Drought, Sustainable Land Management and Sand and Dust Storms.

Key message 2

Develop and implement policies and governance at the national and sub-national levels that actively:

- Support agroecological and agroforestry approaches and practices of local communities, pastoralist communities and Indigenous Peoples to ensure food security and the right to food.
- Support women-led, youth-led, community-led and Indigenous-led conservation and restoration of natural ecosystems, including forests, grasslands, and water bodies.
- Limit water-intensive business practices.
- End all public support for land-degrading agriculture, infrastructure, extractive industries and land conversion for renewable energy production.

Key message 3

Support locally led actions and initiatives and knowledge exchange between local communities, pastoral communities, Indigenous Peoples, CSOs, policymakers, politicians, scientists, and researchers by accessible funding mechanisms (including small grants) that consider the leadership, characteristics and requirements of local groups and the organisations that support them to build sustainable, inclusive and resilient societies.

Key message 4

Ensure the mobilisation of public financial resources that keep pace with the escalating negative effects of desertification, land degradation, drought and sand storms, through measures such as taxation and fiscal incentives.

Key message 5

Support, develop, and implement plans in line with the UNCCD decisions at the national and sub-national levels that are complementary to and coherent with the plans of the Climate Change and Biodiversity Conventions.

Key message 6

Ensure inclusive monitoring, reporting and communication processes of actions, especially of locally led actions, such as agroecological approaches and practices, and community-led conservation and restoration of natural ecosystems.

Key message 7

Report on SDG targets that are relevant for UNCCD in general and more specifically on indicators 15.3.1 (LDN), 1.4.2 (land tenure security), 5.a.1 and 5.a.2 (land tenure security for women), 11.5 (disasters, including water-related disasters), 17.9.1 (financial and technical assistance for SDGs) and include these indicators into PRAIS.

Key message 8

Support the implementation of COP14 Decision 26 on land tenure security by making capacity and funding available for practical knowledge development activities for policymakers, decision-makers, land administrators, civil society, and local organisations (in particular those led by women, youth, pastoralists, Indigenous Peoples) based upon the UNCCD-FAO Technical Guide on the Integration of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests into Land Degradation Neutrality (such as an international programme of short courses for mid-career professionals).

Key message 9

Collect, update and harmonise sex and age-disaggregated data on legitimate tenure rights (including informal tenure and customary rights) and facilitate knowledge exchange between local communities, pastoral communities, Indigenous Peoples, civil society actors, local authorities and policymakers on the implementation of VGGTs at the national, subnational and local levels for responsible land governance.

Key message 10

Encourage cross-sectoral and multi-level knowledge exchange between scientists, policymakers, decision-makers, local communities, pastoral communities, Indigenous Peoples and civil society actors.

Key message 11

Actively contribute to the implementation of the Gender Action Plan, and support the UNCCD secretariat to establish a gender team within the secretariat and the GM to incorporate the recommendations of the independent evaluation of the UNCCD Gender Action Plan, and support timely delivery of activities named in the Gender Action Plan Roadmap presented at CRIC21.

Key message 12

Encourage more inclusivity within UNCCD:

- Support the Gender Caucus to organise network and knowledge-sharing events during and in between the official UNCCD meetings.
- Ensure that a gender expert is included in the Terms of Reference for the composition of the UNCCD Science-Policy Interface.
- At the national level, name gender focal points for UNCCD.
- Support the Youth Caucus to organise network and knowledge-sharing events during and in between the official UNCCD meetings.
- Support and facilitate the establishment of an Indigenous Peoples' Caucus within the UNCCD to enhance their effective and practical participation in UNCCD processes.

- Support and actively engage with civil society organisations on UNCCD matters, policies and reporting and in preparation of the COPs and CRICs, at the local, subnational, national and international levels.
- Provide training, workshops, and exchange platforms to Parties, civil society, scientists, and other key actors to enhance understanding of inclusivity within the UNCCD and the other Rio Conventions
- Financially support the CSO Panel in mobilising CSOs within the context of UNCCD.
- Welcome representatives of the UNCCD CSO Observer group appointed by the CSO Panel to be part of the contact groups.

We also call on Parties to promote environmental education focused on youth and children and to support peace efforts to end conflicts across the world which hinder attempts to tackle DLDD.

These policies are central to building drought resilience, restoring ecosystems, ensuring sustainable land use, and fostering healthy food systems.

Second, we ask Parties to provide accessible funding through innovative mechanisms tailored to the needs of rights holders and grassroots organisations which empower locally-led action, knowledge exchange and capacity building.

Funding should be made available without political impediments or relying on intermediaries.

Finally, we call on Parties to strengthen CSO participation for more meaningful engagement, including:

- Allowing CSOs as silent observers in contact groups;
- Providing financial support for translation services and capacity building, among others.

As we mark the 30th anniversary of the UNCCD, let us seize this moment to scale up actions against desertification, land degradation, and drought. It is time to translate declarations into decisive action for a sustainable and equitable future.

Critical times require critical actions. As we look towards COP17, let us carry a collective resolve: to protect the land that sustains us, honour the wisdom and rights of its stewards, and forge a path that secures dignity and opportunity for all.

Annex IX

Documents before the Conference of the Parties at its sixteenth session

[English only]

<i>Document symbol</i>	<i>Title</i>
ICCD/COP(16)/1/Rev.1	Provisional agenda and annotations. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/COP(16)/2	Midterm evaluation of the 2018–2030 Strategic Framework of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. Report by the Intergovernmental Working Group
ICCD/COP(16)/3	Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification communication plan. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/COP(16)/4	Promotion and strengthening of relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/COP(16)/5	Programme and budget for the biennium 2025–2026. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/COP(16)/6- ICCD/CRIC(22)/2	Comprehensive multi-year workplan for the Convention (2025–2028) and two-year costed work programme for the Convention (2025–2026). Note by the secretariat
ICCD/COP(16)/7	Financial performance for the Convention trust funds. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/COP(16)/8	Audited financial statements for the Convention trust funds for the year ended 31 December 2022, including the report of the United Nations Board of Auditors. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/COP(16)/9	Audited financial statements for the Convention trust funds for the year ended 31 December 2023, including the report of the United Nations Board of Auditors. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/COP(16)/10	Report on the status of contributions to the Convention trust funds for the triennium 2022–2024. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/COP(16)/11	Report of the Evaluation Office. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/COP(16)/12	Participation and involvement of civil society organizations in meetings and processes of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/COP(16)/13	Participation and involvement of the private sector in meetings and processes of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. Report by the GM
ICCD/COP(16)/14	Accreditation of intergovernmental organizations, civil society organizations and representatives from the private sector, and admission of observers. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/COP(16)/15	Follow-up on policy frameworks and thematic issues: Drought. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/COP(16)/16	Follow-up on policy frameworks and thematic issues: Sand and dust storms. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/COP(16)/17	Follow-up on policy frameworks and thematic issues: Gender. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/COP(16)/18	The positive role that measures taken under the Convention can play to address desertification/land degradation and drought as one of the drivers that causes migration. Note by the secretariat

<i>Document symbol</i>	<i>Title</i>
ICCD/COP(16)/19	Follow-up on policy frameworks and thematic issues: Land tenure
ICCD/COP(16)/20	Final report by the Intergovernmental Working Group on Drought
ICCD/COP(16)/21- ICCD/COP(16)/CST/9	New emerging issues: grassland and rangeland and ecologically sustainable agri-food systems. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/COP(16)/21/Add.1- ICCD/COP(16)/CST/9/ Add.1	New emerging issues: grassland and rangeland and ecologically sustainable agri-food systems. Note by the secretariat. Addendum
ICCD/COP(16)/22	Draft decisions for consideration at the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/COP(16)/22/Add.1	Draft decisions for consideration at the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties. Note by the secretariat. Addendum
ICCD/COP(16)/23	Credentials of delegations. Report of the Bureau to the Conference of the Parties
ICCD/COP(16)/INF.1	Information for participants. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/COP(16)/INF.2	Note on the high-level segment of the Conference of the Parties at its sixteenth session. Note by the secretariat

Documents before the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention at its twenty-second session

<i>Document symbol</i>	<i>Title</i>
ICCD/CRIC(22)/1	Provisional agenda and annotations. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/COP(16)/6- ICCD/CRIC(22)/2	Comprehensive multi-year workplan for the Convention (2025–2028) and two-year costed work programme for the Convention (2025–2026). Note by the secretariat
ICCD/CRIC(22)/3	Report on the performance of Convention institutions and subsidiary bodies (2022-2024). Note by the secretariat
ICCD/CRIC(22)/4	Financing of programmes and projects concerning desertification, land degradation and drought. Report by the Global Environment Facility
ICCD/CRIC(22)/5	Progress made in the mobilization of resources for the implementation of the Convention and Sustainable Development Goal 15.3 matters. Report by the Global Mechanism
ICCD/CRIC(22)/6	Promotion of capacity-building to further the implementation of the Convention. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/CRIC(22)/7- ICCD/COP(16)/CST/8	Improving procedures for the communication of information as well as the quality and formats of reports to be submitted to the Conference of the Parties. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/CRIC(22)/8	Draft decisions for consideration at the twenty-second session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/CRIC(22)/8/Add.1	Draft decisions for consideration at the twenty-second session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention. Note by the secretariat. Addendum

<i>Document symbol</i>	<i>Title</i>
ICCD/CRIC(22)/INF.1	UNCCD Financial Needs Assessment: Main Trends and Key Findings

Documents before the Committee on Science and Technology at its sixteenth session

<i>Document symbol</i>	<i>Title</i>
ICCD/COP(16)/CST/1	Provisional agenda and annotations. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/COP(16)/CST/2	Policy-oriented recommendations resulting from evidence on sustainable land use systems and their potential to address desertification/land degradation and drought, under objective 1 of the Science-Policy Interface work programme for the triennium 2022–2024. Report by the Executive Secretary
ICCD/COP(16)/CST/3	Policy-oriented recommendations resulting from evidence on historical global and regional aridity trends and future projections, under objective 2 of the SPI work programme for the triennium 2022–2024. Report by the Executive Secretary
ICCD/COP(16)/CST/4	Policy-oriented recommendations resulting from the cooperation with other intergovernmental scientific panels and bodies. Report by the Executive Secretary
ICCD/COP(16)/CST/5	Interfacing science and policy, knowledge sharing and technology transfer. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/COP(16)/CST/6	Review of the Science-Policy Interface and its achievements. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/COP(16)/CST/7	Work programme for the Science-Policy Interface beyond 2024. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/CRIC(22)/7- ICCD/COP(16)/CST/8	Improving procedures for the communication of information as well as the quality and formats of reports to be submitted to the Conference of the Parties. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/COP(16)/21- ICCD/COP(16)/CST/9	New emerging issues: grassland and rangeland and ecologically sustainable agri-food systems. Note by the secretariat
ICCD/COP(16)/21/Add.1- ICCD/COP(16)/CST/9/ Add.1	New emerging issues: grassland and rangeland and ecologically sustainable agri-food systems. Note by the secretariat. Addendum
ICCD/COP(16)/CST/10	Draft decisions for consideration at the sixteenth session of the Committee on Science and Technology. Note by the secretariat
