

UNCCD Executive Secretary Sworn in at UN Headquarters

Institutional milestone as Dr Yasmine Fouad warns of systemic risks from land degradation and drought

Bonn, Germany, 2 April 2026 — The Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Dr Yasmine Fouad, was sworn in on 31 March at United Nations Headquarters in New York, formally completing her assumption of functions within the United Nations system.

She took the oath of office before the United Nations Secretary-General, pledging to discharge her duties “*with the interests of the United Nations only in view.*” The moment underscores her role at the heart of the United Nations system at a time of growing global challenges.

The ceremony marks a key institutional milestone, confirming her status as an international civil servant of the United Nations, with a mandate to serve with independence, integrity and in the exclusive interest of the Organization.

Following the ceremony, Executive Secretary Fouad met with the Secretary-General to discuss how land degradation, drought and resilience can be further elevated within the broader United Nations agenda. This includes priorities such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, climate action, food systems and stability

Reflecting on the urgency of the challenge, Dr Fouad said: “*Land is not just an environmental issue. It is the foundation of our economies, our food systems and our stability. Yet it is being degraded at an unprecedented pace. If we do not act now, the risks will continue to cascade across water, food and livelihoods. This requires sustained action on land restoration and drought resilience as essential pillars of global stability and sustainable development.*”

Land degradation and drought are increasingly recognized as systemic global risks, affecting nearly half of humanity and generating major economic losses. Land degradation alone costs the global economy nearly USD 900 billion annually, while droughts account for at least USD 300 billion in losses each year. Their impacts ripple across food systems, water availability, supply chains and livelihoods.

Closing the gap between current investment levels and the scale of the challenge will be critical to accelerating action on land restoration and drought resilience.

UNCCD works at the intersection of these global priorities. As the United Nations’ dedicated platform on land, the Convention plays a critical role in connecting environment, development, climate and peace agendas. It advances the Sustainable Development Goals, strengthens climate resilience and supports stability in vulnerable regions. Land degradation and drought also act as risk multipliers, contributing to economic stress, displacement and fragility.

Against this backdrop, while in New York, the Executive Secretary also met with United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and engaged with Member States, including representatives of the presidencies of the Conference of the Parties (COP), Saudi Arabia (COP16) and Mongolia (COP17). She also held a series of bilateral meetings to strengthen partnerships and mobilize support for land restoration and drought resilience.

These discussions focused on accelerating implementation on the ground. This includes increased financing, stronger private sector engagement, and closer cooperation across the UN system and with international partners. Particular attention was given to translating political momentum into scalable solutions and investments. They also highlighted the role of land in addressing interconnected challenges such as the land, water and food nexus, drought risk management and the growing impacts of sand and dust storms.

As preparations advance for the seventeenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP17), to be held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, in August 2026, UNCCD is working with partners to translate this into concrete action, scaling up restoration, strengthening drought resilience and mobilizing the investment needed.

By placing land at the center of the global agenda, UNCCD aims to support countries in building more resilient economies, more stable societies and a more sustainable future. COP17 will serve as a critical moment to demonstrate delivery and accelerate global action.

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For more information, please contact the UNCCD press office: press@unccd.int

About UNCCD

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is the global vision and voice for land. We unite governments, scientists, policymakers, private sector and communities around a shared vision and global action to restore and manage the world's land for the sustainability of humanity and the planet. Much more than an international treaty signed by 197 parties, UNCCD is a multilateral commitment to mitigating today's impacts of land degradation and advancing tomorrow's land stewardship in order to provide food, water, shelter and economic opportunity to all people in an equitable and inclusive manner.