



Mongolia's Message on 100 Days to UNCCD COP17: Restoring Land. Restoring Hope.

In just 100 days, Mongolia will welcome the world to a crucial summit on the future of our land.

The 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP17) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) will convene from 17-28 August 2026 in Ulaanbaatar under the theme of “Restoring Land. Restoring Hope.”

The first of the three Rio Conventions’ COPs—on land, biodiversity and climate change—taking place this year, UNCCD COP17 will set the tone on the level of ambition and action in addressing these interconnected and urgent global challenges.

As global pressures on land, food, energy and water systems intensify, the international community must come together to sustain healthy land as a foundation for our collective wellbeing, stability and prosperity.

The economic case is clear. Desertification, land degradation and drought already costs the world nearly USD 900 billion every year, yet investing in land restoration can generate returns of up to USD 35 for every dollar invested. Drought alone costs the world at least USD 300 billion annually, yet every dollar invested in drought resilience can yield up to ten in improved ecosystem services and livelihoods.

At the same time, desertification, land degradation and drought are increasingly recognized as risk multipliers, intensifying competition over resources, driving displacement and heightening instability, particularly in already vulnerable regions.

In Mongolia, these challenges are immediate and deeply connected to livelihoods, food security and long-term development. Nearly 77 per cent of the country’s land is affected by degradation, threatening economic development and a way of life for around one-third of the

population; droughts are hitting harder and more often, and the annual number of days with sand and dust storms has more than tripled since the 1960s.

But Mongolia is not just an epicentre of global impacts of desertification, land degradation and drought; the country is on the forefront of innovative solutions—by scaling up investment in land restoration and drought resilience, strengthening sustainable food systems, and supporting communities on the frontlines of land degradation.

These efforts include large-scale restoration and tree-growing programmes under the national Billions of Trees movement, strengthened sustainable pasture and rangeland management, investment in climate-resilient agriculture and water systems, and greater support for herder communities and local land users. Mongolia is also promoting integrated approaches linking land restoration, food systems, biodiversity conservation and drought resilience across dryland ecosystems.

Mongolia also seeks to elevate the role of digital innovation and artificial intelligence infrastructure as emerging tools for combating desertification and restoring degraded land. Advances in AI, satellite monitoring, geospatial mapping and predictive analytics can help governments and communities better monitor land health, anticipate drought risks, improve water management and target restoration investments more effectively. By integrating science, technology and traditional knowledge, Mongolia aims to promote smarter and more inclusive approaches to dryland resilience by announcing a **“Green AI Infrastructure Initiative”**.

This innovative initiative aims to develop renewable-energy-powered data centers as a new pillar of the national economy and will directly showcase how the host country converts climate ambition into economic action. Cold-climate data centers using closed-loop cooling systems consume as little as 10–20 cubic meters of water per year (vs. tens of millions of liters in hot climates). In a world of growing water scarcity, Mongolia's cold-climate advantage also means minimal water consumption — directly aligned with the Parliament resolution on 3*100 Green Energy resolution and Mongolia's NDC3.0 water conservation goals.

As part of its UNCCD COP17 legacy, Mongolia is focusing on four flagship initiatives that are linked to the COP17 Action Agenda and thematic days on Land and People, Food Systems and Soil Health, Finance and, for the first time, Water:

Rangelands: Stretching across more than half of the Earth's land surface, rangelands support around 2 billion people and underpin food systems, biodiversity conservation and climate resilience. Yet today, up to half of these rangelands are degraded or at risk. The Rangelands Flagship Initiative championed by Mongolia is critical to protecting food security, climate stability, biodiversity, and progress toward key Sustainable Development Goals.

Food systems: By 2050, the world will need to produce at least 50 per cent more food, even as food systems remain the leading driver of land degradation globally and simultaneously are highly vulnerable to its impacts, with millions of people facing



hunger today. By transforming our food systems and promoting soil health, we can secure nutritious and plentiful food for a growing global population. For instance, restoring degraded lands the size of Mongolia can increase food security for 200 million people.

Business4Land: Restoring land at scale requires around one billion US dollars per day, but current funding falls far short. The private sector, which currently contributes just a fraction of global investments in land restoration and drought resilience, has a major role to play in closing this gap and unlocking large-scale finance. Through the Business4Land Initiative, Mongolia will mobilize investment in healthy land as a prerequisite for robust and resilient value chains.

Land-Water Nexus: Global freshwater demand could exceed supply by up to 40 per cent by 2030, while droughts have already increased by nearly one-third since 2000. Recognizing that land degradation and water scarcity are deeply interconnected, Mongolia is leading a global initiative to secure climate-resilient solutions by placing groundwater at the centre of integrated, science-based and finance-ready action, particularly in drylands.

COP17 comes at a moment when the scale of the challenge is clear, and so is the cost of inaction. We must turn global commitments into tangible results that reach those who need them most.

As the Mongolian proverb goes, "Эвтэй бол хүчтэй" (United we are strong). We look forward to working with UNCCD's Parties and partners on the road to COP17 in Ulaanbaatar—a landmark moment to show that multilateralism can generate people-centred solutions in the face of multiple global challenges.

Let's restore land and, in doing so, restore hope for present and future generations.

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