



United Nations
Convention to Combat
Desertification



RANGELANDS DESERTIFICATION
RECOGNIZE & DROUGHT DAY
RESPECT
RESTORE 17 JUNE 2026

Kenya hosts Desertification and Drought Day as pressure on world's rangelands intensifies

- *Up to half of the world's rangelands are degraded or at risk, with drought hitting them hardest*
- *Rangelands support around two billion people and provide nearly 70 per cent of global livestock feed*
- *Eurasian grasslands lost up to 43 per cent of productivity under extreme drought, while agricultural expansion is a major threat facing South American rangelands*
- *Southern Africa's rangelands support livelihoods and local economies, with around 70 per cent of land used for livestock grazing*

Kilifi County, Kenya/Bonn, 17 June 2026 – From the Eurasian steppes and the grasslands of South America to the savannas of Southern Africa, drought, climate change and unsustainable land use are placing growing pressure on the world's rangelands — with up to half already degraded or at risk — threatening food systems, water security, biodiversity, livelihoods and the resilience of communities worldwide, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) warned today on this year's Desertification and Drought Day.

Scientists warn that rising temperatures and worsening drought conditions are increasing pressure on rangelands worldwide, contributing to soil erosion, water stress and biodiversity loss.

Rangelands cover more than half of the Earth's land surface, support around two billion people and provide nearly 70 per cent of global livestock feed, making them one of the world's most important yet underappreciated food production systems. As droughts intensify and water shortages affect more communities worldwide, governments, scientists and local communities are calling for urgent action to recognize, protect and restore rangelands and support the pastoralist communities and land stewards who depend on them.

In a video message marking Desertification and Drought Day 2026, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said: *“This year also marks the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists – a chance to support the pastoralists and Indigenous Peoples whose traditional knowledge can help safeguard these ecosystems. To protect our future, we must protect the land.”*

Observed under the theme “Rangelands: Recognize. Respect. Restore.”, Desertification and Drought Day 2026 focused on the growing importance of sustainable pastoralism, drought resilience and ecosystem restoration. Hosted by the Government of Kenya, the global observance of Desertification and Drought Day 2026 brought together high-level national and local authorities, communities, youth representatives and development partners at Vipingo Central Primary School in Kenya's Kilifi County. Drylands and



rangelands cover around 80 per cent of Kenya's land area and support millions of people through pastoralism, livestock production and related value chains.

“I commend the Government of Kenya for helping bring global attention to the importance of rangelands and pastoralists. As droughts intensify and competition over land and water resources grows, restoring rangelands must become part of how countries strengthen resilience, secure food systems, reduce risk and support livelihoods. Knowledge and solutions already exist. The challenge now is scaling up investment and implementation,” said UNCCD Executive Secretary Yasmine Fouad

Kenya’s Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Forestry Deborah M. Barasa said: *Kenya is proud to host this important global moment. For us, this is not just another global event. It is a conversation that touches the daily lives of our people, especially our pastoralists, farmers, women, youth, and communities living in rangelands, who understand better than anyone the value of land, water, livestock, and nature.*

As we gather here at Kilifi County, may we use this occasion to listen, to learn from one another, and to renew our commitment to action. We must recognize the true value of rangelands, respect the communities who depend on and care for them, and work together to restore these landscapes for generations to come.

From Eurasia to Southern Africa

Across Eurasia, climate change, worsening drought conditions and unsustainable land management are accelerating degradation across the world’s largest continuous grazing region. Stretching more than 8,000 kilometres from the Black Sea to Northern China, the Eurasian steppes comprise around a quarter of the world’s rangelands and support millions of pastoralists and livestock producers.

The [UNCCD Silk Road Caravan](#) journey across Eurasia ahead of COP17 in Mongolia is also highlighting the importance of sustainable pastoralism and rangeland restoration across these landscapes.

Scientists warn that rising temperatures and increasing drought intensity are contributing to soil erosion, water stress and biodiversity loss across the region. Recent studies also found Eurasian grasslands experienced a 43 per cent reduction in annual productivity under extreme drought conditions, compared to 25 per cent in North American grasslands.

In South America, some of the world’s most productive grasslands and savannas are being transformed by agricultural expansion, deforestation and intensive livestock production. The Gran Chaco, Cerrado and Pampas are increasingly under pressure from monoculture farming and land conversion, while prolonged droughts and heatwaves are reducing the resilience of native vegetation and pastoral systems.

Meanwhile, in Southern Africa, where around 70 per cent of land is used for livestock grazing, communities are reviving traditional grazing systems and local land management approaches to strengthen drought resilience, restore degraded land and improve soil and water retention.

In countries such as Zimbabwe and Angola, locally led initiatives based on rotational grazing and traditional pastoral systems are helping restore ecosystems, improve water availability and reduce conflict over natural resources.



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Restoration and resilience

Despite growing pressures, the encouraging news is that viable solutions already exist. Rotational grazing, pastoral mobility, silvopastoral systems, Indigenous knowledge and community-based rangeland management are increasingly demonstrating how degraded lands can recover while continuing to support livelihoods, food production and biodiversity.

Evidence from multiple regions also shows that healthy rangelands are often more resilient to drought due to their perennial vegetation and deep root systems, which help retain water and protect soils during prolonged dry periods.

Rangelands and pastoralists will be in focus at the forthcoming seventeenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD (COP17), which will take place in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, from 17 to 28 August 2026.

COP17 is expected to help advance international cooperation on sustainable land management, drought resilience and land restoration finance as countries intensify efforts to address desertification, land degradation and drought worldwide.

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Notes to Editors:

[Website](#) on Desertification and Drought Day 2026

Access audiovisual materials on the global observance event [here](#).

For more information, please contact:

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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.

About Desertification and Drought Day



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Officially declared by the United Nations General Assembly in 1994 (A/RES/49/115), Desertification and Drought Day, marked annually on 17 June, is a unique occasion to highlight practical solutions to combating desertification, land degradation and drought. Countries around the world mobilize to mark the Day through educational, cultural, scientific and community-led activities.

This year, Desertification and Drought Day was observed through events and initiatives in 18 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America, including Egypt, Ecuador, Germany, Spain, Greece and Kenya, as well as through the Silk Road Caravan initiative spanning several Eurasian countries. Events ranged from scientific dialogues and restoration campaigns to pastoralist exchanges and regional policy discussions focused on drought resilience, sustainable rangeland management and ecosystem restoration.

About UNCCD COP17

The 17th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP17) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) will be hosted by Mongolia in Ulaanbaatar from 17 to 28 August 2026 under the theme *Restoring Land. Restoring Hope.*

COP17 is expected to bring together representatives of UNCCD's 197 Parties, alongside leaders from government, business and civil society, as well as scientists, youth, Indigenous Peoples, pastoralists and smallholder farmers. Participants will work to advance solutions to the interconnected challenges of desertification, land degradation and drought, while recognizing that restoring land is also critical to reducing instability, preventing displacement and strengthening human and environmental security in vulnerable regions.