



United Nations
Convention to Combat
Desertification



UNCCD
COP17
ULAANBAATAR 2026

UNCCD COP17 INFORMAL GUIDE

ULAANBAATAR, MONGOLIA
17-28 AUGUST 2026



RESTORING LAND
RESTORING HOPE

JULY | 2026

Seventeenth session of the UNCCD Conference of the Parties

Ulaanbaatar, 17-28 August 2026

15-16 August	Regional consultations
15 August	CRIC and CST Bureau meetings
16 August	COP Bureau meeting
17-28 August	Conference of the Parties - COP
17-21 and 27 August	Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention - CRIC
18-21 August	Committee on Science and Technology - CST
24-27 August	Ministerial dialogues/high-level segment -Thematic Days
17-28 August	Action Agenda, side events and exhibition area

This informal guide was prepared by the UNCCD secretariat with the purpose of assisting participants to the meetings in Ulaanbaatar in making the session a success. This guide seeks to provide an overview of the structure, programme and agenda items of COP 17, CST 17 and CRIC 24, and practical information on how the work is carried out at the formal and informal settings. This guide is not meant to offer substantive proposals on the decisions to be made at the COP, but to support effective organization of work and focused discussions during the sessions.

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



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Introduction

The seventeenth session of the Conference of the Parties - COP 17 - of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) will be held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, from 17 to 28 August 2026. This conference will have an ambitious negotiation set-up, with topics ranging from safeguarding rangelands to a global framework for addressing drought. The COP will also have an Action Agenda consisting of events, performances and meetings organized by a wide variety of stakeholders. The high-level segment will be organized during the second week of the COP, including three ministerial dialogues. Four thematic days provide the context for the second week.

The conference will consist of two main areas:

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



1. Starting the COP and its subsidiary body meetings

Although the two-week meeting is generally called “COP 17”, in reality it consists of sessions of the COP and its two subsidiary bodies: the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) and the Committee on Science and Technology (CST). The COP itself takes different forms: it convenes as a high-level segment and a civil society dialogue platform in addition to the usual plenary sessions, and it also establishes a Committee of the Whole (COW) as a procedurally more suitable body for negotiations on its agenda items.

The formal opening of the COP will take place during the morning session of Monday 17 August. It will be a festive, ceremonial event with opening statements by a small number of high-level representatives as well as regional and interest groups. If individual Parties want to make an opening statement, they may do that in a later time slot on Monday afternoon. Then the COP will adopt its agenda and organization of work, elect most of the Bureau members (for details, please see chapter 3.3) and establish the COW.

The COP plenary closes after completing these first procedural tasks and immediately after, a chair for the COW gets appointed and the COW starts working. It will have just a few items on its agenda in the first meeting: (1) the UNCCD programme and budget, (2) the report of the intergovernmental working group on the future strategic framework, and (3) drought policy framework. Starting these items early is meant to provide them with plenty of time for negotiations at the contact group level. The COW will have three more plenary meetings during the first week and two meetings during the second week, the last of which on Thursday 27 August is meant for adopting its decisions.

In parallel to the COW, on Monday afternoon, the CRIC will start. It will meet during the morning and afternoon sessions on Tuesday, morning session on Wednesday and afternoon session on Friday. After that, its contact group will continue, with the aim to have all decisions on its agenda adopted by Thursday 27 August.

The CST opens its first meeting on Tuesday morning in parallel to the CRIC. It will continue meeting on Tuesday afternoon, Wednesday morning and Thursday afternoon, as well as in its contact group, with the aim to complete all decisions on its agenda in its last session on Friday 21 August.

Thus, the CRIC and the CST plenaries will meet only during the first week, with the exception of the last CRIC plenary meeting on Thursday of the second week. Only two plenary meetings can take place in parallel, so if both the CRIC and the CST plenaries meet, the COW will not.



2. Overview of the negotiations

COP 17 will have a multitude of important decisions to make on the following topics, among others:

- **Rangelands and pastoralists, and agricultural lands** will be in the spotlight in Ulaanbaatar. These two topics will strengthen the UNCCD attention on the socio-economic importance of protecting land, with emphasis on food security and long-term sustainability of land-based production. Decision on the policy framework on rangelands and pastoralists (item 5 of the COP agenda) will promote global collaboration and support to conserve, sustainably manage, and restore rangelands, with reference to the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists 2026. Under CST (agenda item 5), Parties will consider science-based guidance for avoiding, reducing and reversing the degradation of agricultural lands and soils.
- **Continuation of the consideration of the global drought agenda:** Over recent years, UNCCD Parties have established a solid consensus on the measures needed for addressing drought under the UNCCD, with focus on proactive work: strengthening early warning, assessing drought vulnerability and impact, and mitigating drought risk. COP 17 is expected to translate this basis into a strong decision for global cooperation on drought. The main decision on drought would be considered under the COP agenda item 5 on policy frameworks, while the CST will consider technical guidance to support aridity, drought planning and adaptation across the Rio conventions and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (CST agenda item 3c). Drought matters will be included also under the CRIC agenda item 4 on finance (reports of the GEF and the GM).
- **Participation of the private sector:** Private companies have a critically important role in efforts to protect and restore land, and COP 17 is a milestone for increasing their involvement. COP will consider ways and means for encouraging and engaging the private sector in addressing desertification, land degradation and drought, including tools for mitigating risks for private investments. Main decision on private sector involvement will be under COP agenda item 8b, and CRIC agenda item 4b (GM report) will also include related considerations.
- **Participation of the civil society:** Last COPs have witnessed a major increase in the involvement of various stakeholders in the UNCCD process. At COP 17, Parties will consider the action taken since COP 16 to facilitate the active engagement of civil society organizations, youth, Indigenous Peoples, local communities and other stakeholder groups in the meetings and activities under the Convention (COP agenda item 8). Parties will be also briefed on the progress made in the establishment of the Indigenous Peoples Caucus and the Local Communities Caucus.
- **Reviewing the UNCCD strategic focus:** COP 17 will decide on the continuation of the development of the next UNCCD strategic framework, building on the report of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Future Strategic Framework of the Convention (COP agenda item 3).
- **Completing the reform of the Science-Policy Interface:** The CST will consider the procedures and modalities for the future SPI and the arrangements for its technical support, building on the COP 16 decision to build the SPI work around four-year work programmes that would generate major science-policy flagship reports (CST agenda item 4).
- **Next steps in UNCCD policy frameworks concerning gender equality, land tenure, migration and security, and sand and dust storms.**
- **Synergies and relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies.**

The COP will also consider several housekeeping matters and standard agenda items, such as the programme and budget for the secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM) and the progress made in the 2026 national reporting.

The key topics of COP 17 are negotiated under different UNCCD bodies, depending on their nature. Below is an overview of the main agenda items of the COP and the two subsidiary bodies.

Main agenda items to be considered under each body in Ulaanbaatar

CST	COP/COW	CRIC
• Future functioning of SPI • Global Land Outlook 3 • Science-policy guidance on agricultural lands • Science-policy guidance on aridity/ drought planning and adaptation • SPI report on its activities • Science-policy knowledge management	• Policy issues: ◦ Rangelands and pastoralists ◦ Drought ◦ Gender ◦ Land tenure ◦ Sand and dust storms ◦ Migration and security • Future strategic framework • Private sector engagement • Civil society participation • Relationships and synergies • UNCCD communication plan • 2027-2028 UNCCD budget	• Report of CRIC 23 (Panama) • 2026 national reporting • Next steps in promoting LDN • Resource mobilization • Collaboration with the GEF • Promotion of capacity building • Secretariat & GM workplan and performance

Acronyms: SPI: Science-Policy Interface, LDN: Land degradation neutrality, GEF: Global Environment Facility



3. Procedures and organization of the negotiations

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

3.1. Organization of work at the plenaries

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

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

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

3.2. Contact group work

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

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

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

- The facilitator calls for general comments to the draft decision
- The draft is amended to include the comments, and as different groups may present differing comments, some parts of the draft decision may end up with several alternative approaches.

- The facilitator opens the first reading. The draft decision text is read through paragraph by paragraph, and the negotiators either agree with the content or give their proposed modifications to it. After the first reading, some paragraphs have been agreed by everyone, some have a few small details to be further considered, and some others contain two or more alternative texts. The text sections that have not been agreed are placed in brackets.
- The facilitator opens the second, third, fourth... reading and the text is cleaned up and modified until all of it is agreed.
- Usually, the text that has been agreed may not be re-opened for negotiation again, although sometimes Parties decide that “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed”, which means that also the agreed text may still be subject to changes until the very end of the negotiations.

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

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

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

The three Bureaus are formally in charge of overseeing the organization of sessions and of any procedural issues. The COP Bureau has nine Vice-Presidents and a President elected in a manner that every geographical region shall be represented by at least two members. An official representing the host country is usually elected by acclamation at the COP opening as the President, thus for COP 17 the president will be an official representative of Mongolia. CRIC and CST Bureaus have five members each including the chair (one per region). The COP Bureau is elected at the beginning of the COP, while the Vice-Chairs of the CRIC and CST Bureaus are elected at the end of the respective subsidiary body session. The CST and CRIC Chairpersons are elected at the last COP Plenary meeting (as decided by decision 25/COP.10 and decision 13/COP.13). During their sessions, the respective Bureaus usually meet daily.

3.4. Role of the secretariat and the GM

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

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

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

4. The high-level segment and the Action Agenda

The high-level segment will take place during the second week of the COP as ministerial dialogues and high-level special events. An opening ceremony organized under the aegis of the Host Country will take place on Monday from 09:00 to 11:00 a.m. This ceremony will feature key messages from high-level authorities and a cultural performance.

The Action Agenda refers to a programmatic process to facilitate the engagement of the non-state actors in the UNCCD process with the aim of accelerating action on the ground by scaling up cooperation, collaboration, innovations and investments to implement UNCCD objectives. During COP, the Action Agenda takes the form of a global networking space with numerous of high-level events, meetings, roundtables, activations and happenings that take place in parallel to the meetings of the COP and its subsidiary bodies, and that are organized in both the Blue and the Green Zone. The Action Agenda serves as a vehicle to align voluntary initiatives, coalitions, projects and programs developed and implemented by cities, local communities and indigenous peoples, private sector, financial institutions, parliamentarians, UN entities, academia to the Convention process and objectives.

While the Action Agenda takes place throughout the two weeks of the COP, its four thematic days during the second week provide the context of the high-level segment. The thematic day events include, among others, the three ministerial dialogues and the Gender Caucus that are part of the official COP agenda (i.e. formally COP plenary meetings), and several special high-level events. Many special events involve high-level participation and while they are not part of the official COP agenda, their outcomes are usually recognized by the COP and included in the COP report for information.

Below is a brief overview of each thematic day and the main events on each day. All listed events take place in the Blue Zone: in the special event room called the “Action Dome”, the Host Country House, the pavilions, the side event rooms or the meeting rooms.



Finance Day (24 August)

Restoring land at scale requires around one billion US dollars per day, but current funding falls far short. Finance Day will bring together ministers of finance, development banks and the private sector to help close this gap and unlock large-scale investment. During this day, specific land-intensive value chain sectors will gather and discuss how to adopt sustainable land management practices, invest in land restoration and drought resilience. Considering the presence of leaders, ministers and other critical stakeholders, different thematic and sectorial events will happen in parallel. The program includes among others:

- Opening of the High-Level Segment
- Ministerial Dialogue on innovative financial mechanisms for healthy land and drought resilience
- Business4Land Forum
- Launch of the Rangelands flagship initiative
- Mining Sector Forum
- Fashion for Land High-Level Forum and Show
- Special High-Level Ministerial event on Security and Migration



Water Day (25 August)

By 2050, three out of four people worldwide are projected to face drought. Water Day will advance the land-water nexus, proactive drought risk management and strengthen cooperation on the integrated management of land and water resources.

- Ministerial Dialogue on accelerating drought resilience
- Drought Risk Investment Facility (DRIF) event
- Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership event and assembly
- Water as a connector: building momentum to UN Water Conference
- From Victoria falls to Ulaanbaatar (Ramsar and UNCCD connections)
- Scaling Great Green Wall through continental integration
- International Drought Resilience Alliance (IDRA) plenary
- Parliamentarians Forum



Land and People Day (26 August)

Rangelands support the livelihoods of some 500 million people but remain among the most undervalued ecosystems globally. Land and People Day will place the voices of land stewards at the heart of discussions, highlighting the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, pastoralists, youth, women and civil society organizations.

- Ministerial Dialogue on the restoration of rangelands and the well-being of pastoralist communities
- The Gender Caucus
- Youth Forum
- Special event on Rangelands
- Special Event on Indigenous Peoples Caucus and Local Communities Caucus
- Special High-Level event on Rio Synergies



Food Systems and Soil Health 27 August

By 2050, the world will need to produce at least 50 per cent more food and will require the restoration of agricultural lands and the preservation of soil health in an unprecedented manner. Food Systems and Soil Health Day will connect soil restoration to food security, agricultural productivity and the livelihoods of farming communities. The program includes:

- Special High-Level Ministerial Event on food systems and soil health
- Living Soils, productive lands from policies to implementation
- Global Flagship Initiative for Food Security.
- Repurposing public support for Food System transformation
- Private Sector and Investment Partners Roundtable
- Food systems transformation in motion: Agroecology in principles, policy and practice
- Youth4Soil Manifesto and Celebration of International Year of Women Farmers
- Action Agenda closing and way forward, from Riyadh, Ulaanbaatar to COP18

The ministerial dialogues are open to all delegations accredited to the Blue Zone of the conference venue, as well as to observer organizations and institutions. They will have interpretation in all six official languages of the UN. Only some of the other events will have interpretation, often only in certain languages, provided by the organizer of the event.

5. How to stay informed during the COP

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

At the beginning of each COP Day, the Daily Journal is the key source of information. It is produced by the UNCCD conference services and presents the planned schedule and programme for the day, including the timing and venue of plenary meetings, contact groups, special events and side events, as well as regional and interest group meetings. The Journal also presents the programme that was concluded in the previous day. The Journal will be published on the App and the UNCCD website (link: <https://www.unccd.int/cop17/daily-journal>) for each day of the COP. The schedule of meetings will also be available on screens in the different hallways of the conference center, guiding participants where to go.

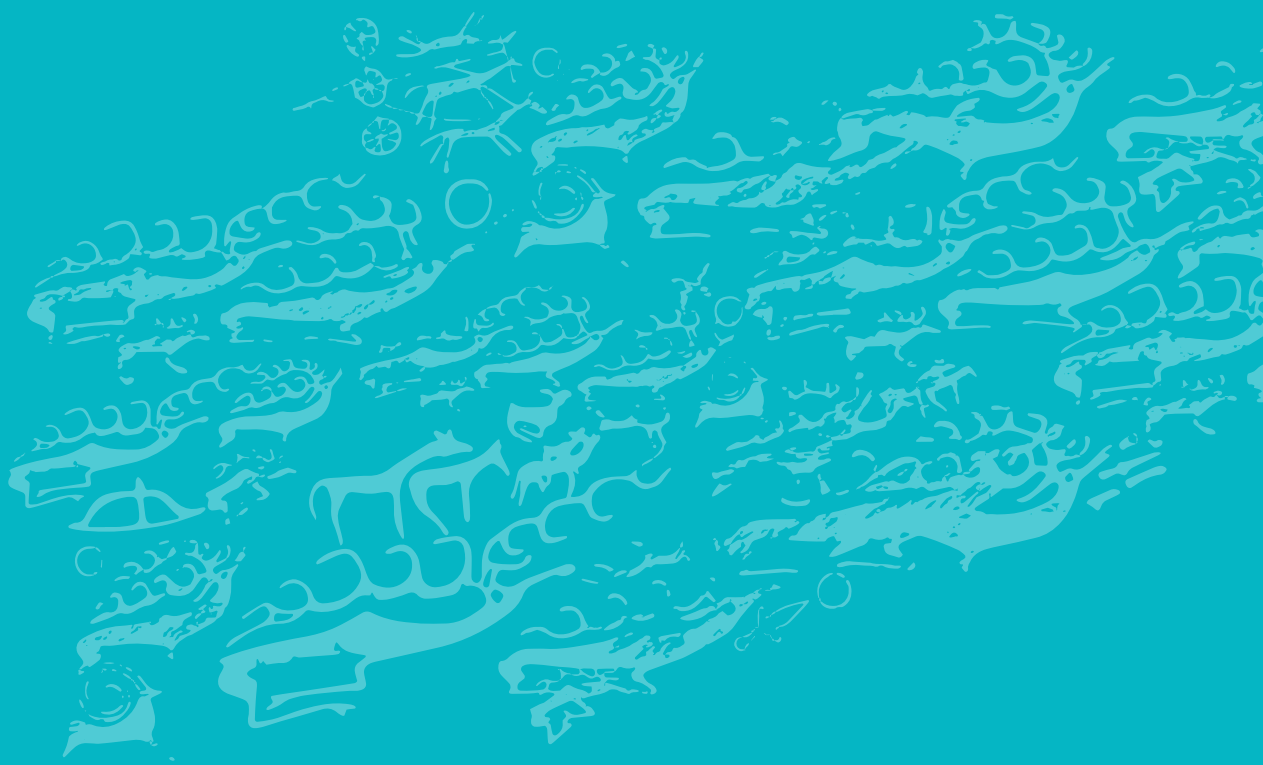
For substantive progress, the Earth Negotiations Bulletin (ENB) online daily reports provide a detailed description of what was negotiated, who proposed what and what's next. It can be accessed on: <https://enb.iisd.org/negotiations/un-convention-combat-desertification-unccd>



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