

UNCCD CRIC 23 - Panama
Asia Pacific Group Closing Statement

CRIC 23 Closing Session

Madam Chair,

Deputy Executive Secretary,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Asia-Pacific Group, Bhutan would like to thank the Government and people of Panama, the Secretariat, the Global Mechanism, Partners, panellists, and all delegations for the highly constructive engagement throughout CRIC 23.

Across all agenda items, several common themes emerged that are central to our region:

First, the urgent need for *predictable, adequate, timely, easily and equally accessible finance*, and increased allocation to DLDD and LDN within multilateral funds, particularly the GEF, as well as streamlined pathways to access funding and more support for innovative instruments that can reduce investment risk in sustainable land management. Many of our countries face increasing impacts from drought, desertification, land degradation, sand and dust storms as well as climate induced erosion and salinity intrusion. . We also urge to support preparation of transformational projects and encourage more private sector investment on land.

Second, we emphasize the importance of *strengthening national capacities, decentralized regional centers and engagement with national institutes*. We reiterate the need for regionally tailored and co-produced practical guidance. Capacity support must reach the subnational level, incorporate science, indigenous and local knowledge and best practices, and align with national planning, reporting, financing and resource mobilization cycle . Access to improved default data, especially for Small Island Developing States (SIDS), hyper arid areas and countries with complex terrain, continues to need attention.

Third, we further emphasize the critical need to expand support for LDN TSP 2.0 for more countries, to address technical capacity gaps, and ensure that countries can access resources to update and implement targets as outlined in LDN action plans. Gender inclusive engagement and

empowerment of local communities, affected populations, and youth in the implementation process should also be encouraged. Spatially explicit monitoring, harmonized digital tools and stronger coordination across the Rio Conventions will be essential for credible progress.

Fourth, the Asia-Pacific region continues to be severely affected by *sand and dust storms*. We urge strengthened regional and interregional cooperation, enhanced early warning and rapid-response systems, and sustained technical and financial support for integrated SDS risk management.

Fifth, the Asia-Pacific region reiterates support for strengthening Science Policy Interface on land. The possibility of conceptualizing a scientific alliance on land is welcomed. It shall develop synergies between scientific bodies involved in producing analytical material on land. We also urge on developing a scientific review on innovative systems that shall support in preventing land degradation.

Looking forward, the Asia-Pacific Group reiterates the call for the establishment of a **Global SIDS Initiative on Drought** to strengthen drought resilience in Small Island Developing States. Given that SIDS cannot rely on transboundary hydrological systems, large groundwater reserves or expansive terrestrial ecosystems, even moderate drought events can quickly escalate into national crises. A dedicated UNCCD SIDS Drought Initiative would therefore provide urgently needed, targeted support for localized drought-resilience measures, improve early-warning capacity, and enhance access to climate and land-degradation finance tailored to SIDS' unique circumstances.

We also encourage the Convention to seek opportunities to elevate global awareness of rangelands. In this regard, we reiterate our call for the designation of an **International Day for Rangelands**, to highlight their vital role in biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, soil and water conservation, pastoral livelihoods and food security.

Finally, the Asia Pacific Group appreciates the value of the UNCCD SIDS Forum as a space for Global SIDS to meet, exchange best practice, interact with stakeholders and agree on common policy positions. We therefore welcome the support of all country Parties to consider the formation of a **UNCCD SIDS Caucus** in the UNCCD. Asia Pacific SIDS is of the opinion that the contributions of Global SIDS to the work of UNCCD demands a formal framework so as to ensure that our voices in the CRICs, CSTs and COPs.

Madam Chair,

As the Asia-Pacific Group, we have done the best we can with the approved agenda items and we remain committed to working constructively toward COP 17. We stand ready to support efforts that strengthen implementation, mobilize resources, deepen science–policy engagement, and explore the possibilities for a future strategic framework, to ensure that no region or community

is left behind, while respecting internal rules and regulations of the Member States. We look forward to engaging in the 2026 reporting process and to sharing our experience and lessons learned at the next intersessional CRIC.

We wish you all safe travels as you return home and look forward to meeting again in Mongolia next year.

Thank you.