



**United Nations**  
Convention to Combat  
Desertification

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**Closing Remarks by**

**Ms. Andrea Meza**

**Deputy Executive Secretary  
United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification**

**CRIC 23**

Panama, 5 December 2025



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Your Excellency,

COP16 Presidency,

COP17 Presidency,

Mme. CRIC Chair

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Colleagues and friends,

As we conclude five days of productive discussions here in Panama, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to you, Minister Navarro, and to the wonderful people of Panama for your warm hospitality throughout this past week. Your support stands as a testament to your steadfast commitment to addressing land degradation and drought, alongside biodiversity loss and the growing impacts of climate change.



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Allow me to begin by conveying the apologies of our Executive Secretary, Yasmine Fouad, who very much wished to be with you today. Due to compelling personal reasons, she had to depart last night and was unable to return to Panama in time to deliver these remarks herself.

Today, on the International Day of Soils, I want to thank all of you for the commitment you have brought to CRIC 23. This meeting marks the midpoint on our road from Riyadh to Ulaanbaatar, and together we have taken **meaningful steps to advance global action to combat land and soils degradation, to build drought resilience** under a people's centre approach.

This week, inside the meeting rooms, but also outside through the action agenda events, we reaffirmed that our collective task is urgent: healthy soils are disappearing, droughts are intensifying, social inequalities are growing, and land degradation and desertification are becoming structural risks to



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our economies, to our businesses and to the well-being of our communities . Yet we have also been reminded that only through working together and building consensus we can face these global and existential challenges and achieve our shared goals. We need a Multilateralism that delivers, that brings solutions on the ground.

Throughout the week, we reaffirmed that **restoration and regeneration begins with people**. We saw inspiring progress in amplifying the voices that too often remain unheard, with a large participation of non-state actors, including civil society representatives, members of the youth caucus, Indigenous Peoples as well as representatives of Local Communities.

CRIC23 will also be remembered as the moment when the first in-person consultation toward establishing the UNCCD **Indigenous Peoples** Caucus took place, and we will continue



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working with all of you to also implement a consultation with local communities.

The **Gender Caucus** showed the transformative power of women's leadership, particularly local communities and Indigenous women who carry ancestral knowledge and deep connections to the land.

You emphasized the importance of capacity building, **land tenure** security and governance, and monitoring and reporting processes as critical building blocks to implement the objective of the convention and our Land Degradation Neutrality targets, and you gave clear guidance on the need and the way on how to mobilize more financial and technical support to structure projects and programs that can deliver impact. In a world of interconnected crises, you highlighted how sand and dust storms threaten the well being of millions of peoples and ecosystems.

We are also hearing about the urgent realities of the **Small Island Developing States** confronting rapidly escalating



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risks, and underscoring that the land agenda is fundamental to the survival of their communities.

With 2026 marking the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists, and ahead of our COP17 in Mongolia, the management, restoration and conservation of these ecosystems, their peoples and culture have been highlighted as a priority.

Dear Colleagues and friends,

Over the past week, the need to create conditions for an ambitious COP decision on drought resilience has been underscored, marked by three important landmarks on the margins of the CRIC. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the COP 16 Presidency, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and their leadership for launching the **Tafa’ul Process**— the first landmark, which kick-started with an important 3-day discussion among countries and experts, and where transparency, inclusivity, and a commitment to work in good



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faith, were mentioned as the foundations upon which successful negotiations are built.

**Second**, we made progress on the **Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership**, with the first meeting of the Steering Committee. With its governance system endorsed and an action plan now in place, this Partnership can support 74 countries in building resilience to one of the world's most devastating hazards. This is not just a technical achievement—it is a lifeline for communities on the frontlines of drought.

**Third**, the **Drought Resilience Investment Facility** launched by Luxembourg and with the support of IDRA, reminded us that resilience requires more than ideas. It requires unlocking public and private funding to turn commitments into results.

Delegates, Colleagues, and Friends,



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Allow me to thank all delegates and observers for your dedication, and the UNCCD Secretariat team and UN Volunteers for their tireless work. With over 142 countries represented, 187 Civil Society Organizations and 18 Intergovernmental organizations, we reached a grand total of close to 2,400 participants.

CRIC 23 has been more than a checkpoint on the road to Mongolia. The challenges are significant—but so is our collective capacity to overcome them. When we choose cooperation over division, action over hesitation, and hope over despair, there is nothing we cannot achieve together.

I wish you all safe travels, and I look forward to seeing you at COP17.

Thank you.