



**United Nations**  
Convention to Combat  
Desertification

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**Opening Speech  
of Monique Barbut  
UNCCD Executive Secretary**

**CRIC 17**

**Georgetown, Guyana, 28 January 2019**



Good morning!

Excellency, Dear Minister,

Distinguished delegates, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me start by thanking the Government and people of Guyana for hosting this 17<sup>th</sup> session of the Committee reviewing the implementation of the Convention.

Thank you for the wet but still very warm welcome to Georgetown.

Throughout my time at UNCCD, I have been known as a “bringer of rain”.

Wherever I travelled the rain came too. I’m glad I did not disappoint today.

I am pleased though - that despite the rain- at this CRIC, I can also bring you a few pieces of good news.



This Convention is ahead of the international SDG game. The reports you are about to review tell us that success is firmly within our grasp. But the steps you take and recommendations you make this week will make or break this momentum.

As you may remember, in 2013, parties revealed a startling fact. 169 of the Convention's 196 Parties claimed they were affected by desertification, land degradation and/or drought. The challenge of Desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) is universal. By the time of the launch of the first edition of the *Global Land Outlook* last year, we knew that at least 20 percent of the Earth's vegetated areas showed persistent degradation.

The first piece of good news is that we know more and more about what is going on. In five major respects, we have a clearer, more accurate picture of land degradation than ever before.



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We now know **how much land we have degraded globally** in the first 15 years of this Millennium. We now know **how life has changed for the communities living on degraded lands**. We now know **how droughts** are evolving globally, the changing status of endangered **biological species**, and the **financial resources available** to address desertification.

Your analysis at CRIC 17 could help sharpen this understanding further.

While interesting new initiatives – such as our emerging partnership with GEO - will help us to keep refining the challenge and opportunity going forward.

The second piece of good news concerns what the reports tell us about the conditions of the affected populations.

In all regions, rural populations have more access to safe drinking water.

And despite the challenges and pockets of extreme difficulty in rural areas, overall poverty has declined by 27%.



The third piece of good news coming from your reports is that Parties are strongly committed to tackle the social, economic and environmental challenges, associated with DLDD, head-on.

More than 120 countries have signaled plans to set LDN targets. And 82 of these countries have set their targets already. We also see the financial resources dedicated to combatting desertification and related issues are increasing – albeit slowly. Private finance at both the domestic and global levels, for example, is showing a strong interest in investing in land management.

So, momentum is with us.

At the same time, the evidence also tells us that the threat of drought is on the rise. We are still not sufficiently well equipped to respond effectively – the special drought initiative notwithstanding.



Critically endangered species are suffering significant losses in part because of changes in our land use.

Aspects such as land governance, education, demography and land use planning still have a long way to go.

But as the people of Guyana will tell you, "*at night, every bush looks like a man.*"

If we are afraid, things seem worse than they are. So let us be brave. And let's not underestimate our ability to trigger change in these most pressing areas.

For example, as a first step, the training and capacity building opportunities offered at the weekend – supported by the private sector – should have helped you to understand and overcome some of the bottlenecks your countries might face.



Promoting gender equality by taking action in the areas laid out in the Gender Action Plan, for instance, could path the way on education and land rights.

Working with local authorities can help to build partnerships with land use planners to bridge the urban-rural divide and mitigate drought and SDS risk.

But most critically, we can increasingly offer proactive, practical solutions to communities. To help secure their livelihoods and homes, food and water. To build resilience in communities - facing hurricanes, flash floods or droughts. By making sure transformative, bankable LDN projects are rolled out at scale.

Let's keep this capacity building initiative and the momentum going.



To do this, CRIC 17 should be providing recommendations that:

- identify solutions to the gaps and obstacles hindering the rapid transition
  - from target setting to the elaboration of transformative projects.
- propose novel ways to mobilize innovative forms of finance and to track all financial resources usefully, comprehensively and systematically.
- identify the most effective entry points for promoting gender equality and
- ensure data gathering is robust, but not burdensome, to motivate all countries to **consistently** report on all the indicators.

CRIC 17 is our opportunity for candid dialogue. The chance to re-examine our assumptions about what is possible. And to chart an even bolder course.

I hope this short but significant CRIC meeting does just that.

Thank you.