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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	AOB for the meeting of the Council (Environment) on 12 October 2026 17th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP17) (Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 17–28 August 2026) - Information from the Presidency and the Commission

The 17th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP17) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) took place in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, from 17 to 28 August 2026, together with the 24th session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 24) and the 17th session of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST 17).

Under the theme “Restoring Land. Restoring Hope” COP17 featured an emphasis on the implementation of actions, including the mobilisation of resources, to combat desertification. Building on Mongolia’s nomadic pastoral tradition, COP17 was launched in Ulaanbaatar during the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists. This gave the world’s rangelands — which cover 54 percent of the Earth's land surface, supporting an est. two billion people and home to 500 million pastoralists — a central place on the agenda. The Rangelands Flagship Initiative was launched to bring together \$1.2 billion (USD) across 45 projects, cited as the largest single mobilization of finance for rangelands in the UNCCD’s history.

COP17 followed the approach adopted at COP16 of a dual approach with Negotiation and Action Agenda tracks, both interlinked to achieve outcomes in formal negotiations and facilitate the implementation of COP decisions. Across the Negotiation and Action Agenda tracks, Ulaanbaatar attempted to bring together key elements of implementation: political direction, science, finance, investment-ready projects, partnerships and stronger participation of land managers globally.

Approximately 15,000 people attended COP17, including government officials from 172 countries, as well as representatives from 38 UN agencies and international organizations, 53 intergovernmental organizations, 42 private sector organisations and 550 civil society organizations. Most EU Member States were represented, as well as the European Commission. Member states, the Commission and Presidency displayed a high level of cooperation and mutual support during the negotiations, ensuring the successful representation of the EU's positions and constructive collaboration with partner countries.

COP17 was nevertheless marked by the approach of certain parties who set out to block progress on agreed areas of the Convention's work. In the opening Plenary session, the USA blocked the adoption of three agenda items relating to gender, participation of civil society and synergies with other UN Conventions, as well as announcing that it would seek the deletion or amendment of agreed language, including on climate change, gender, Indigenous Peoples, local communities and other people in vulnerable situations, from other decisions. The Russian Federation also objected to the agenda item on the intersessional process to develop the future implementation framework (Intergovernmental Working Group for the Future Strategic Framework, IWG FSF) of the Convention, on the basis that the Central and Eastern Europe region did not participate in the work of the IWG-FSF, as well as on items related to the work of the Science-Policy Interface to be discussed under the CST. Türkiye, along with USA, blocked in practice the negotiations on the decision on migration, which is also a long-standing agenda item for UNCCD COPs.

Despite the negotiation challenges these blockages presented over the subsequent two weeks, other Parties showed considerable unity in calling for adoption of the full COP17 agenda. Ultimately, Parties were able to reach agreement on 34 decisions covering a range of key issues, including rangelands and pastoralists, land tenure, capacity-building, resource mobilization, sand and dust storms (SDS) and the Convention budget. Parties also adopted a decision on the future functioning of the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) to strengthen the role of evidence-based knowledge in decision-making, while also providing Parties with advice and policy recommendations for supporting implementation of the Convention.

As previously referenced, several agenda items were blocked from consideration, and several other substantive issues were deferred to COP18. These include the agenda items on gender, civil society participation, and synergies with other multilateral conventions. Parties were also unable to reach substantive agreement on other issues including migration, guidance to support aridity and drought planning across the Rio conventions, and knowledge sharing and technology transfer. Parties, however, managed to agree to include these items on the COP18 programme of work, and to put provisions in place so that relevant work can take place in the interim, preserving the mandates given to the Secretariat by the relevant COP 16 decisions.

After informal negotiations facilitated by the Mongolian presidency, the Russian Federation agreed to drop its objection to the discussion of the report of the IWG-FSF, allowing the COP to agree a decision renewing the mandate of the IWG with updated terms of reference and thus allowing the development of the Future Strategic Framework of the Convention to continue.

Parties could not advance the discussions on future global action on drought, and therefore decided to continue discussions on drought at COP18 with a view to adopting a decision on the proactive management of drought at all levels. Parties also decided that drought will remain a stand-alone agenda item at future COPs and agreed to hold intersessional participatory consultations in the run up to COP18.

A High-level Segment took place during the second week of COP17 from 24-27 August, including a Ministerial Segment and the Action Agenda which featured thematic days ('Finance', 'Water', 'Land and People' and 'Food Systems and Soil Health'). Parties also endorsed a political declaration, the 'Ulaanbaatar Declaration'. In their closing statements, the European Union and other parties expressed their ongoing commitment to the multilateral process and their disappointment at the fact that key issues were not discussed at COP17.

Alongside the negotiations, COP17 delivered a series of initiatives and financial commitments aimed at accelerating action on land restoration and drought resilience. This includes the launch of the Drought Resilience Investment Facility (DRIF), the first global catalytic financing platform dedicated to drought resilience. Co-created by UNCCD and Luxembourg with support from the International Drought Resilience Alliance, the Facility aims to mobilize up to \$400 million USD in public and private capital for investments in water security, sustainable agriculture, nature-based solutions and land restoration. Its first strategic partnership with the Global Environment Facility will explore opportunities to unlock private and philanthropic finance.

Another milestone was the unveiling of Phase II of the International Drought Resilience Observatory (IDRO), the first global observatory dedicated to drought resilience. Furthermore, UNEP presented the Drought Resilience Capacity Index (DRCI), which should help countries in the future to assess their capacity to anticipate, prepare for and adapt to drought while identifying vulnerabilities and informing more effective policies and investments.

The conference marked the first formal meetings of the UNCCD Indigenous Peoples Caucus and Local Communities Caucus, following the decision by Parties at COP16 in Riyadh to establish the two bodies and provide dedicated spaces for their perspectives and priorities within the Convention. A high-level special event on Land and People Day highlighted Indigenous Peoples as rights holders, knowledge holders and implementation partners, focusing on Indigenous knowledge systems, customary governance, sustainable pastoralism, land stewardship and direct access to finance for Indigenous-led action.

The next session of the UNCCD Conference of the Parties, COP18, will take place in Egypt in 2028.

Work of the subsidiary bodies of the Convention:

1. Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC)
The 24th meeting of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) took place alongside COP17. Contact Group discussions took place on draft decisions relating to capacity-building, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) report, the Global Mechanism (GM) report, the programme of work for CRIC 25 (which shall be held in Belgrade, Serbia in 2027, at a date to be determined) and the election of officers. These decisions were approved at the closing CRIC Plenary session on 28th August and forwarded to the COP for adoption.
2. Committee on Science and Technology (CST)
The Committee on Science and Technology met alongside COP17 amidst difficulties presented by opposition to Agenda item 2 (the work programme of the Science-Policy Interface) from the Russian Federation. This blockage was subsequently lifted on the final day of COP17 as a result work by the COP Presidency to progress the IWG-FSF membership issues cited by Russia as the reason for their objection.

The CST held contact groups for 5 days longer than initially anticipated, but eventually the CST approved and forwarded all its draft decisions to the COP for adoption, except those on knowledge sharing, technology transfer and innovation, and science-policy recommendations on supporting aridity and drought planning across the Rio conventions, which will be included in the programme of work for consideration at COP18.

Lastly, the CRIC and CST jointly discussed the draft decision on: 'Improving the procedures for communication of information as well as the quality and formats of reports to be submitted to the COP' in contact groups and passed the draft decision to the COP for adoption.