



Distr.: General
20 May 2024

English only



**United Nations Environment
Assembly of the United Nations
Environment Programme**

**166th meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives
to the United Nations Environment Programme**

Nairobi, 13 June 2024

Conference Room 2

10:00 – 18:00 (GMT+3)

Hybrid meeting

Agenda item 7: Preparations for COP 16 of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

This paper serves as a background document for the Agenda Item 7 on preparations for the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification which will take place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, from 2 to 13 December 2024.

During the meeting, the UNEP Secretariat will provide a presentation on how the focus of COP 16 relates to the implementation of UNEP's Programme of Work and of UNEA resolution.6/14 on strengthening international efforts to combat desertification and land degradation, restore degraded land, promote land conservation and sustainable land management, contribute to land degradation neutrality, and enhance drought resilience ([UNEA/EA.6/14](#)).

Following the presentation, the Committee is invited to take note of the briefing and engage in an exchange of views with Committee Members and the Secretariat.

Background note for the Committee of Permanent Representatives of UNEA

To be held on 13 June 2024 in Nairobi

Virtual briefing by Executive Secretary of UNCCD, Mr. Ibrahim Thiaw

1. The [ministerial declaration adopted at the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly](#) underlined the “sense of urgency the threats posed to sustainable development by global environmental challenges and crises including ... desertification, land and soil degradation, drought... and their impacts on human health and the environment.” In this spirit, the same UNEA passed a resolution on “strengthening international efforts to combat desertification and land degradation, restore degraded land, promote land conservation and sustainable land management, contribute to land degradation neutrality and enhance drought resilience.”
2. Today, over 40% of the world’s land is degraded, directly affecting half of the world’s population and threatening nearly half of the global GDP. If current trends continue, a staggering 1.5 billion hectares of degraded land will need to be restored by 2030 to meet the global target enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Yet SDGs will hardly be achieved unless we better understand the links between land loss, drought and key areas, including migration, global security, health and human security. By reducing land loss and building resilience to drought, humanity can avert many of the global crisis we are faced with – food insecurity, poverty, hunger, forced migration, insecurity, health crisis, destabilized economies and societies. Every hectare of land we bring back to health will help build immunity against climate change and biodiversity loss.
3. The upside is that land reparation activities are 1) accessible to all – so local communities are not just the beneficiaries but the drivers of change; 2) inexpensive and 3) with a high return on investment : for every \$1 invested in land restoration there is a \$30 economic return. Land restoration has multiple other benefits as it generates revenue for local populations, creates green jobs, and increases agricultural productivity. 4) Which is what we aim to achieve at the upcoming UNCCD COP16,

hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from 2-13 December 2024, in Riyadh. The first UNCCD COP held in the Middle East, coincides with the 30th Anniversary of the UNCCD. It will be a landmark event for accelerating action on land and drought resilience. –At COP 16, the 197 Parties to the Convention are expected to provide clear guidance on collective actions to:

1. Restore 1.5 billion hectares of degraded land between now and 2030,
 2. adopt a landmark decision on drought preparedness, response and resilience, following three years of work of an intergovernmental working group on Drought,
 3. tackle escalating disaster risks such as sand and dust storms,
 4. scale up nature-positive food production,
 5. strengthen women’s land rights to advance land tenure, land restoration, and
 6. promote decent land-based jobs for youth.
4. The COP is set to be driven by an ambitious 3-pronged Action Agenda focused on People-Land-Drought, which will include the following themes (with dedicated thematic days):
1. Land [and private sector]
 2. Drought Resilience / Water
 3. Agri-Food Systems
 4. People [Gender, Youth, Indigenous Peoples and Local communities, Civil Society]
 5. Governance [water and land management; women’s land rights];
 6. Finance
 7. Science, Technology and Innovation
5. The Programme of the COP includes a Leaders Summit (2-3 December, tbc) with a Global component as well as a regional components. A high -evel ministerial session will take place on the second week (9-10 December).
6. The **success of the COP** very much depends on the participation of Member states and the ability to negotiate meaningful outcomes on land and drought. Building on the unique opportunity of having the 3 Rio Conventions COPs happen in a sequenced manner (UNCBD COP16 in October; UNFCCC COP 29 in November and UNCCD COP 16 in December), and building on priorities established by UNEA, this is an

opportunity to pass coherent and meaningful decisions that not only speak to the synergies between the various MEAs but that above all, address the multiple and interconnected crisis the planet is currently facing.