



United Nations
Convention to Combat
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GOVERNOR'S OFFICE
OF THE CAPITAL CITY
ULAANBAATAR

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Leaders adopt Ulaanbaatar Declaration, calling for stronger local action for land resilience

Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 21 August 2026 — About 30 mayors, governors and other local and regional leaders gathered this week at the UNCCD COP17 Mayors' Forum adopted the Ulaanbaatar Declaration, committing to advance local action on sustainable land management and drought resilience, and calling for a stronger, more permanent role for cities and regions in the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) process.

The Forum, held from 20 to 22 August 2026 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, was hosted by the Governor's Office of the Capital City of Ulaanbaatar and co-organized by the UNCCD Secretariat, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the Local2030 Coalition and ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI), with United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), through the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments (GTF), as key partner. It brought together over 200 participants from more than 30 countries, including local and regional leaders, international organizations, city networks, financial institutions, academic and research bodies, and private sector representatives.

At the Forum, the Ulaanbaatar Initiative was also put forward. Led by the Capital City of Ulaanbaatar, this voluntary effort will test a practical way for cities to measure and report on land degradation, with results shared with the Convention by COP18.

What the Ulaanbaatar Declaration commits to

The Ulaanbaatar Declaration builds on the commitments made by local and regional governments at UNCCD COP16 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Ulaanbaatar carries this process forward, moving from political recognition towards sustained engagement and implementation between COPs.

The Declaration, titled *Local Leadership for Land Resilience: Advancing Implementation across the Rio Conventions*, sets out five calls to action addressed to local and regional governments, UNCCD Parties, the UNCCD Secretariat and their partners:

1. **Advance integrated local action** on sustainable land management, drought resilience, biodiversity, climate resilience, water security and sustainable urban development, while strengthening urban-rural linkages. These interconnected challenges demand integrated, locally led solutions.
2. **Strengthen the role of local and regional governments** within the UNCCD process itself, including through more structured and regular engagement between sessions of the Conference of the Parties, building on the Riyadh Process.
3. **Strengthen coherence across the three Rio Conventions and the water agenda**, encouraging more coordinated implementation at the local level and thereby advancing the 2030 Agenda.
4. **Support implementation through partnerships and finance**, including calls for more direct, simplified and predictable access to finance for local and regional governments.
5. **Promote knowledge, innovation and cooperation**, including peer learning and the exchange of practical experience such as nature-based solutions.

By transitioning from advocacy to implementation alliances, the Declaration directly turns global commitments into concrete, on-the-ground action to advance SDG 6 worldwide — **marking a key milestone on the Local2030 Coalition's "Road to Abu Dhabi: The Local Way"— a dedicated stakeholder engagement journey to shape global agendas ahead of the 2026 UN Water Conference and the 2027 SDG Summit.**

Signatories commit to advancing local action on sustainable land management, land restoration and drought resilience, deepening cooperation between cities and regions, and promoting inclusive approaches that engage communities, youth, women and Indigenous Peoples. The Declaration also reaffirms the Riyadh Process as the continuing platform for structured dialogue between the UNCCD, its Parties and organized local and regional governments.

Quotes

B.Purevdagva, Governor of the Capital City and Mayor of Ulaanbaatar: “Land resilience is not an abstract global agenda. It is about whether our cities can provide safe water, clean air, green spaces, secure livelihoods and a healthy future for our children and our communities. Through the Ulaanbaatar Declaration and the Ulaanbaatar Initiative, we are advancing a people-centered, gender-sensitive and child-friendly approach to sustainable urban development, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. Ulaanbaatar is proud to help connect local and regional governments across dryland and extreme-climate regions, so that

cities can share knowledge, measure land degradation more practically, and turn global commitments into action in our communities. This initiative is our contribution to a stronger regional and global network of cities working together for land, water, climate resilience and future generations.”

Yasmine Fouad, Executive Secretary of the UNCCD: “National commitments set the direction, but implementation ultimately happens in cities, regions and communities. Local and regional governments make many decisions that shape how land and water are managed, how communities prepare for drought, extreme heat and other climate-related risks. And how resilient infrastructure and services are delivered. The Ulaanbaatar Declaration is an important step in moving from recognition of their role to sustained engagement and practical action. Their experience, knowledge and proximity to communities are essential if we are to turn global commitments into measurable results on the ground.”

Ursula Sautter, Deputy Mayor of Bonn, Germany: “This process started in Bonn in 1999, and it means a great deal to see it reach this point almost thirty years later, with mayors from every region adopting a shared declaration. Bonn will continue to stand behind this work, as a founding partner of this dialogue and as home to the UNCCD Secretariat.”

Ji Rimutu, Deputy Mayor of Ordos, China: “Participating in this Mayors' Forum, I deeply feel that local governments are the key implementers in desertification control. Ordos's practice of “holding back the desert with green growth” demonstrates that firm governance commitment and continuous innovative measures can rejuvenate deserts. We look forward to deepening cooperation with all cities, sharing sand-control technologies, jointly shouldering ecological responsibilities, and striving hand in hand to enhance the green well-being of all humanity.”

Ingrid Cavalcanti Feitosa, State Secretary for Environment, Sustainability and Climate Action of Sergipe, Brazil: “The impacts of desertification are felt most directly at the local level, which is why subnational governments play a strategic role in developing effective solutions. For Sergipe, supporting the Ulaanbaatar Declaration is an opportunity not only to push for actions on land and drought, but also to share our experience in strengthening protected areas, restoring degraded lands and advancing climate adaptation policies, particularly in the Caatinga — an exclusively Brazilian biome that faces significant challenges related to desertification, many of which are interconnected with those experienced by other territories. Knowledge exchange and international cooperation are essential to strengthening our capacity to respond to a challenge that transcends borders.”

Oumar Ba, Mayor of Ndiob, President of the Association of Mayors of Senegal, President of UCLG Africa:

“Local and regional governments are essential partners in turning global commitments on land restoration and drought resilience into action in our territories. Through UCLG and the Global

Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, we are bringing our collective experience and priorities into the UNCCD process. Building on the progress achieved in Riyadh, the Ulaanbaatar Mayors' Forum must further strengthen the recognition and meaningful participation of local and regional governments in global land governance.”

Anacláudia Rossbach, UN-Habitat Executive Director:

“Urbanization, land and water are deeply interconnected challenges that require locally led solutions. The New Urban Agenda recognizes the social and ecological functions of land, while the right to adequate housing is at the heart of sustainable development and linked to access to water, public space and basic services. Following the reviews of SDG 11 and the New Urban Agenda, the Ulaanbaatar Declaration reinforces our commitment to move from global ambition to implementation. As co-chair of the Local2030 Coalition, UN-Habitat is committed to unlocking more direct and predictable finance for local governments. From Ulaanbaatar to Abu Dhabi, we must turn global commitments into tangible improvements, ensuring that no one and no place is left behind.”

Building on nearly three decades of city engagement

The Mayors' Forum builds on a process of municipal cooperation on desertification that dates back to the World Forum of Mayors on Cities and Desertification, held in Bonn, Germany, in 1999, and that has since continued through forums in Rome, Italy; Ordos, China; and Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The 2024 Riyadh Mayors' Forum affirmed the essential role of local and regional governments in addressing land degradation, desertification and drought, a role that this year's Forum sought to deepen further.

This year represents a historic junction for global policy, converging the World Urban Forum (WUF13), the global review of SDG11, the midterm review of the New Urban Agenda, and the three Rio Conventions COPs—with the UN Water Conference in Abu Dhabi serving as the crucial capstone. Forum participants highlighted this as a rare opportunity to strengthen coherence across the global agendas on land, biodiversity, climate and water, and to ensure local and regional governments are recognized as central actors in delivering on all three. They also emphasized that localization is the ultimate engine for systems change, turning global policy into local impact, building on lessons from a series of major UN gatherings over the past two years: the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development in Seville, Spain; the Second World Summit for Social Development in Doha, Qatar; and the UNFCCC Conferences of the Parties in Baku, Azerbaijan, and Belém, Brazil.

Over three days, the Forum combined high-level policy dialogue with technical exchange and peer-to-peer learning. Sessions addressed urban ecosystem restoration and sand and dust

storms, water scarcity and drought resilience, sustainable urban growth and land use, and financing mechanisms to move commitments into implementation.

Following the Forum, the UNCCD Secretariat and partners will work together to track voluntary progress on the Declaration's commitments, with findings to be presented at the next Mayors' Forum and at UNCCD COP18.

About Ulanbaatar

Ulaanbaatar is the capital city and economic, political and cultural centre of Mongolia, home to nearly half of the country's population and serving as the main hub for government, business, education, innovation and international cooperation. Located in a high-altitude valley connected to wider rangeland, forest and river ecosystems, the city faces many challenges common to dryland and extreme-climate cities, including air pollution, water security, land degradation, rapid urban growth and climate-related risks. Guided by its long-term development vision, Ulaanbaatar is working to become a more people-centred, gender-sensitive, child-friendly, green and resilient city, while using the Ulaanbaatar Declaration and the Ulaanbaatar Initiative to strengthen global and regional cooperation and contribute practical solutions for sustainable land management, urban resilience and the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals.

About UNCCD

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is the global vision and voice for land. We unite governments, scientists, policymakers, private sector and communities around a shared vision and global action to restore and manage the world's land for the sustainability of humanity and the planet. Much more than an international treaty signed by 197 Parties, UNCCD is a multilateral commitment to mitigating today's impacts of land degradation and advancing tomorrow's land stewardship in order to provide food, water, shelter and economic opportunity to all people in an equitable and inclusive manner.

About ICLEI

ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability (known as ICLEI) is a global network working with more than 2500 local and regional governments committed to sustainable urban development. Active in 125+ countries, we influence sustainability policy and drive local action for zero emission, nature-based, equitable, resilient and circular development. Our Members and team

of experts work together through peer exchange, partnerships and capacity building to create systemic change for urban sustainability.

About UCLG

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) is the world's largest organization of local and regional governments and their associations, representing and advocating for their interests on the global stage. Headquartered in Barcelona and present across all world regions, UCLG brings together cities, metropolitan and regional governments, and national and subnational associations to promote democratic local self-government, strengthen cooperation among territories, and amplify the collective voice of local and regional governments in international decision-making. Through advocacy, policy dialogue, knowledge-sharing and decentralized cooperation, UCLG works to ensure that local and regional governments are recognized as essential partners in addressing global challenges and advancing sustainable development that leaves no one and no place behind.

About Local2030 Coalition

The Local 2030 Coalition is the United Nations System platform to accelerate the localization of the 2030 Agenda, enhancing coherence, efficiency, and the impact of UN action. 14 UN entities drive the Coalition, co-chaired by UN-Habitat and UNECE, ensuring that the UN system is equipped to articulate global goals and national policies with local contexts, needs, and priorities, while securing a single and powerful UN approach to localization.

About UN-Habitat

UN-Habitat is the United Nations entity responsible for sustainable urbanization. It has programmes in over 90 countries supporting policymakers and communities to create socially and environmentally sustainable cities and towns. UN-Habitat promotes transformative change in cities through knowledge, policy advice, technical assistance, and collaborative action. To know more, visit unhabitat.org or follow us on social media @UNHABITAT.

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