

Statement of Faith and Spiritual Leaders Committed to Land Restoration

To the Seventeenth Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP17) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia | 17–28 August 2026

Restoring Land. Restoring Hope.

Distinguished Heads of State, UNCCD Secretariat, Ministers, Delegates, Representatives of Civil Society, participants of UNCCD COP17.

We the faith communities representing many faiths including Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Baha'i faith, Brahma Kumaris, Indigenous spirituality, and other religious and spiritual traditions, organized dozens of side events, addressing the issues around land degradation and the urgent need for land restoration.

As land degradation and the impacts of desertification intensify globally, we as faith communities, raise our voices to the governments and peoples gathered at the 17th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP17), united in our conviction that the restoration of land is both an ecological necessity and a moral imperative. Representing diverse religious traditions and millions of people around the world, we affirm that caring for the Earth is inseparable from caring for one another.

The theme, **"Restoring Land. Restoring Hope,"** speaks to a profound truth shared across our faith traditions: hope is cultivated when life is renewed, justice is restored, and humanity lives in right relationship with creation. We welcome Mongolia's leadership in placing land restoration at the center of the global agenda and in recognizing the interconnected challenges of land degradation, drought, food insecurity, biodiversity loss, climate change, and water scarcity.

Today, desertification, land degradation and drought threaten the lives and livelihoods of billions of people. The degradation of land undermines food security, deepens poverty, fuels displacement and conflict, erodes biodiversity, and weakens resilience to climate change. These challenges fall most heavily on those who have contributed least to environmental degradation—smallholder farmers, Indigenous Peoples, pastoralists, women, children, and communities already living in conditions of vulnerability. As people of faith, we cannot remain silent in the face of such injustice.

Our religious convictions teach us that creation is a sacred gift entrusted to humanity.

Across our diverse traditions, we affirm that the Earth is not merely a resource to be exploited for the benefit of humans but a shared home to be cherished, protected, and restored. Humanity has been entrusted with the responsibility to exercise wisdom, humility, and stewardship in caring for creation so that all living beings may flourish.

Therefore:

COP17 is the right moment to reaffirm our shared responsibility to restore degraded lands and safeguard the ecological foundations of life.

Our religious convictions teach us that justice requires solidarity with the most vulnerable.

The moral measure of our societies is found in how we protect those most affected by environmental degradation. The loss of productive agricultural land, including cropland and rangelands, threatens food security, livelihoods, cultural identity, and peace. When fertile soils disappear, so do opportunities for dignified lives and sustainable futures.

As the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists, we welcome the Convention's growing attention to drought resilience, sustainable land management, restoration of rangelands, secure land tenure, and the rights and participation of Indigenous Peoples, pastoralists, women, and local communities. These priorities reflect the understanding that ecological restoration and social justice must advance together.

Therefore:

COP17 is the right moment to place human dignity, equity, and justice at the heart of global efforts to combat desertification, land degradation, and drought.

Our religious convictions teach us that hope is expressed through action.

Hope is not passive optimism. It is demonstrated through courage, cooperation, and the willingness to transform our ways of living.

We recognize that restoring degraded land requires a combined effort from sustained political commitment, scientific knowledge, traditional wisdom, and adequate financial investment. It also requires stronger cooperation among the Rio Conventions, acknowledging that healthy land underpins climate resilience, biodiversity conservation, water security, and sustainable food systems.

Therefore:

COP17 is the right moment to strengthen international cooperation and accelerate ambitious implementation of the UNCCD Strategic Framework and preparations for the Convention's future beyond 2030.

Our religious convictions teach us that peace with one another depends upon peace with creation.

Healthy soils, resilient landscapes, secure water resources, and thriving ecosystems are foundations of peaceful societies. Conversely, environmental degradation intensifies competition over scarce resources, contributes to forced migration, and increases instability.

By restoring land, protecting biodiversity, strengthening drought resilience, and supporting sustainable food systems, we invest not only in ecosystems but also in peace, reconciliation, and the wellbeing of future generations.

Therefore:

COP17 is the right moment to recognize land restoration as an investment in peace, human security, and the common good.

We call upon all governments to:

- Strengthen commitments and action to halt and reverse desertification, land degradation, and drought through ambitious implementation of the UNCCD Strategic Framework and preparation of a transformative post-2030 framework.
- Increase financial commitments for large-scale land restoration, drought preparedness, and ecosystem resilience, ensuring that resources reach the communities most affected by land degradation. The \$1.3 billion mobilized at COP17 is a meaningful step, but it is a drop in ocean, compared with the estimated \$355 billion per year needed for land restoration and drought resilience through 2030.
- Protect the rights, knowledge, and meaningful participation of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, pastoralists, women, and youth in land restoration policies and programmes.
- Promote sustainable food systems, agroecology practices, and healthy soils as essential foundations for ending hunger, protecting biodiversity, and building climate resilience.
- Strengthen integrated action across the three Rio Conventions so that efforts on climate change, biodiversity, and land degradation reinforce one another.
- Ensure that science, innovation, traditional and indigenous knowledge, and ethical values work together in support of restoration that is just, inclusive, and sustainable.
- Guarantee meaningful participation of civil society and faith communities in the implementation and review of the Convention.

We, as faith communities, one of the largest land owners of the world, **we commit ourselves to:**

- Promote ecological justice and care for land as central expressions of our faith.
- Commit to contribute to land restoration process by leading by example

- Mobilize and support community-led initiatives for sustainable agriculture, “yogic-agroecology”, “God’s way of farming” land restoration, drought resilience, and Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR).
- Stand in solidarity with communities whose lives and livelihoods are threatened by desertification, land degradation, and drought.
- Encourage lifestyles that respect the limits of the Earth and promote responsible consumption and stewardship.
- Educate our communities about the interconnectedness of land, water, biodiversity, climate, and human wellbeing.
- Strengthen interfaith cooperation in advancing peace, justice, and the integrity of creation, towards a future in which restored lands sustain flourishing communities and future generations.

The decisions taken at COP17 will shape not only the future of landscapes and ecosystems but also the future of humanity. We urge all Parties to act with wisdom, urgency, and a shared sense of responsibility for our common home.

Our faith traditions remind us that healing is possible. Degraded lands can be restored, communities can recover, and hope can take root where actionable justice is cultivated.

May this Conference be remembered as the moment when the international community chose restoration over degradation, cooperation over division, and hope over despair.

Together, let us restore land—and in doing so, restore livelihoods for present and future generations.

On behalf of the faith communities present at the UNCCD COP17, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia