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Ethiopia Joins Global Land Tenure Commitment, Signaling New Momentum for People-Centred Restoration at UNCCD COP17

Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 27 August 2026: Ethiopia has become the 17th country to endorse the Intergovernmental Land Tenure Commitment (ILTC), a global pledge to recognise and strengthen the land rights of Indigenous Peoples, local communities and Afro-descendant communities across 160 million hectares by 2030. Ethiopia's endorsement was announced at the UN Convention to Combat Desertification's 17th Conference of the Parties (COP17) and further discussed during a side event during Land and People Day. There, government representatives, UN agencies and civil society organizations made the case that secure land tenure is not an abstract policy question, it is what determines whether a farmer invests in her soil, whether a pastoralist community can plan for next season, and whether a restoration project outlives the funding that started it.

"Secure land tenure is fundamental to Ethiopia's food security, sustainable development and climate resilience. By joining the ILTC, Ethiopia is strengthening international cooperation to put people and land at the heart of climate action. As we look towards COP32 in Addis Ababa, we have an important opportunity to carry this ambition forward," said Dr. Teshome Tamirat, Head of the Department of Forest at Ethiopian Forestry Development.

Ethiopia's endorsement draws on the country's extensive experience with land certification and restoration, and strengthens the link between secure tenure and progress across all three Rio Conventions — timing that carries particular weight ahead of Ethiopia's hosting of UNFCCC COP32 in Addis Ababa.

The session, "*Advancing UNCCD's Land Tenure Agenda: Recognising People's Rights for People and Planet*," brought together three strands of the current debate: the formal UNCCD negotiation process, voluntary commitment mechanisms such as the ILTC, and evidence from restoration practice on the ground.

Additional speakers included government representatives from Germany (Constanze Neher, Director Global Issues and Trends, Poverty and Inequality, Governance, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)) and Peru (Jesus Fernando Villegas Samanez, Director of Climate Change Adaptation and Desertification, Government of Peru, Ministry of Environment), along with experts from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Land Coalition (ILC), IUCN, and Regreening Africa, Landesa and TMG Think Tank for Sustainability, who discussed next steps to secure land tenure for people-centred land restoration.

Marcy Vigoda of the International Land Coalition (ILC), one of the event's co-organizers, pointed to the ILTC's expansion beyond forest ecosystems as a key reason the conversation belongs at UNCCD rather than remaining confined to the UNFCCC. "Rangelands sequester nearly as much carbon as forests — 34% in fact — and are the largest ecosystem on earth, but have not been part of the narrative to date. Seeing the ILTC

open to other ecosystems tells us this model can grow into something that truly reflects the diversity of custodian communities stewarding land around the world," she said.

Beth Roberts of Landesa, another co-organizer, noted that amidst the stalled negotiations at COP17, a clear focus on implementation is more urgent than ever. "The work of enacting and implementing national and local efforts to achieve land degradation neutrality has never been more urgent. We have taken big strides forward within the UNCCD space, and we will continue to partner from grassroots to global levels to secure land tenure rights and gender equality to address the urgent crises we face as a global community."

Land Tenure's long road onto the UNCCD agenda

Land tenure's place on the UNCCD agenda reflects seven years of incremental progress across three COPs — decisions 26/COP.14, 27/COP.15 and 28/COP.16 — each moving the Convention closer to treating secure tenure as central to combating desertification rather than a side issue.

Speakers were clear that sustaining this progress now depends on two processes: the Future Strategic Framework (FSF), currently being negotiated for the period beyond 2030, which will determine whether tenure is embedded as a core pillar of the Convention's next decade; and the parallel effort to integrate land tenure indicators into UNCCD's own monitoring and reporting system, closing the gap between existing global indicators — including under the SDGs and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework — and what UNCCD actually tracks on the ground. Without that data, speakers noted, tenure security risks remaining a stated priority rather than a measured one.

The session also took place against a backdrop of significant challenges to multilateralism at COP17 this year, with several long-standing principles — including on cross-convention cooperation, gender, and civil society engagement, including the creation of two new caucuses, one for Indigenous Peoples and one for local communities — facing renewed contestation, and an unprecedented departure by a few Parties from the Convention's consensus practice.

"Many Parties are still wary about addressing land rights and focus on the technical aspects of land restoration," remarked Jes Weigelt from TMG. "This need not be the case. The speakers at this side event collectively demonstrated that we possess the knowledge to do both: advance land restoration and realise people's rights. The side event co-organisers have shown that we have built the necessary networks to take this pivotal topic forward, even if some Parties object to more ambitious language."

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