UNCCD COP 17, Ulaanbaatar 2026

Restoring Land, Restoring Hope



Over the course of two weeks, UNCCD COP17 brought together governments and a wide range of stakeholders to advance action on land restoration, drought resilience, water, rangelands and food systems.

The Mongolian Team's Trip to COP17

In August, our Mongolian team (Zaya, Brenda, Carmen, and Erdenetsgot) joined forces with Herb from the Arctic team for a productive trip to Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia!



It was an action-packed week dedicated to sharing our team's research, learning from local experts about the critical issues surrounding land degradation and desertification, and helping host side events in partnership with the Ărramăt project.

Nomadic Future's Conference

Nomadic Futures: Cultural Rights, Knowledge Systems, Climate Resilience International Conference.

Hosted by UNESCO, The School of Geography and the Environment, and the University of Oxford.

Members of our team attended the conference to deepen our understanding of how global environmental change, legal marginalization, and resource competition impact pastoralist rights and climate adaptation. Key takeaways underscored the vital role of nomadic knowledge systems in fostering biodiversity conservation, landscape-level resilience, and social equity in the face of shifting climate paradigms.

Furthermore, our team actively contributed to the academic discourse: **Carmen Hamel** presented her Master's thesis research, *"Nowhere Else to Go: Mining Expansion, Climate Uncertainty, and Herder Resilience,"* within the session *"Rights and Rising Extractivism in Nomadic Territories."* Her presentation highlighted how the rapid growth of extractive industries compounds climate risks for local herders in Erdenet, Mongolia, underscoring the urgent need for legal protections and territorial rights.



Carmen Hamel posing in front of the conference sign.



Team picture in front of the conference sign.

From left to right: Altanzaya, Nemekhjargal, Brenda, Tumendelger, Carmen, Erdenetsogt, Uuriintuya, and Herb

Attending COP17

A week of sharing, learning, and reflecting on ways and methodologies that safeguard Indigenous Peoples and local communities livelihoods in times of changing sociopolitical factors and climate change.

UNCCD COP17 Sessions

We attended sessions highlighting:

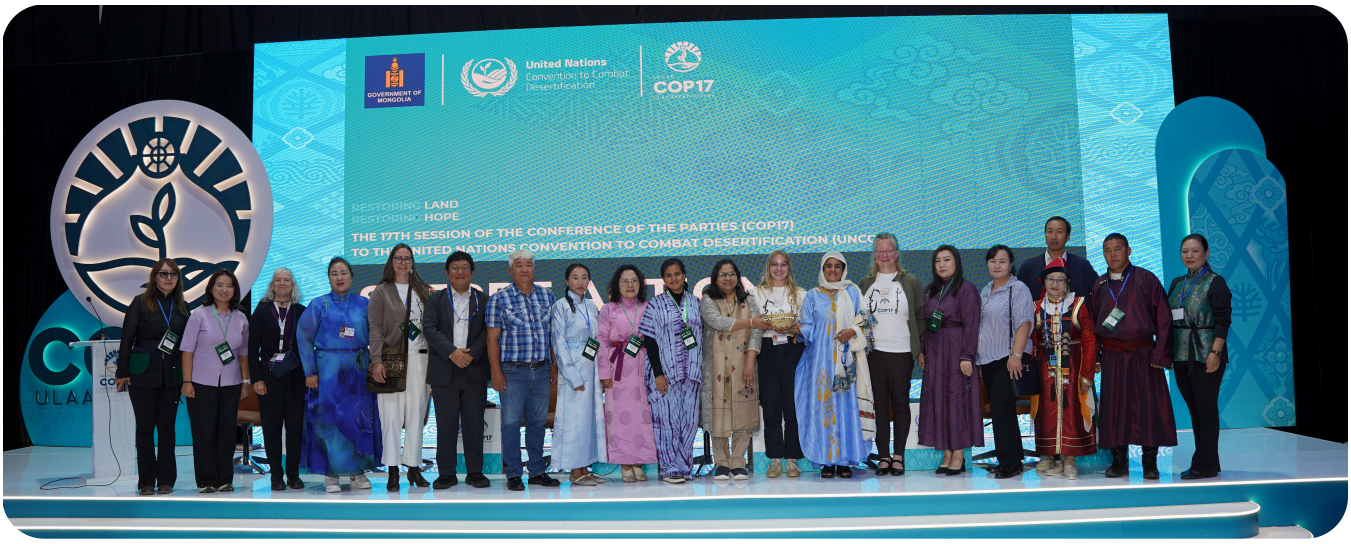
- **Mining & Land Degradation:** The severe impacts of extractive industries on pastoral livelihoods, acceleration of topsoil erosion, and drivers of localized desertification.
- **Water Security & Governance:** The critical need to secure equitable water access and legal rights to support climate adaptation and navigate the resource demands of the green energy transition.
- **Biodiversity & Indigenous Stewardship:** How empowering Indigenous-led conservation and safeguarding ecosystem biodiversity directly combat land degradation and restore degraded environments.
- **Traditional & Indigenous Knowledge:** The vital role of Indigenous perspectives and generational knowledge in building climate resilience, protecting traditional territories, and shaping effective adaptation strategies.



From left to right: Erdenetsogt, Carmen, Uuriintuya, Nemekhjargal, (missing name), Tumendelger, (missing name), Altanzaya, Batnaran, Herb.

Supporting and Participating in Side Events

In collaboration with the Ărramăt Project, the Green Colonialism Team helped facilitate a side event discussing securing equitable land rights and legal recognition for Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, youth, and pastoralists. The session highlighted the essential link between secure land tenure, responsible land management, and long-term climate resilience. Principal Investigator **Brenda Parlee** led the dialogue, and **Erdenetsgot Sumiyasuren** presented on the immediate challenges and support needs of Mongolian pastoralists.



From left to right: UNKNOWN, Sainbuyan, Maria, Mend-Amgalan, Kristine, Ichiro, Batnaran, Ariunaa, Tumendelger, Imane, Chatterjee, Carmen, Saoudata, Brenda, Uuriintuya, Saikhanaa, Nemekhjargal, Erdenetsgot, Bayarkhuu (missing name).

Cultural Learning

An important part of collaborating with community partners and local researchers is learning about their culture and traditions. Our research partners at the Mongolian National University of Education arranged for the Canadian team to take part in a traditional Mini Naadam Festival with local herders and spend the night in the countryside eating traditional meals.



The team having a traditional meal (lamb) at Mini-Nadam.



Youth horse racers preparing for a race.

Mini Naadam Festival

Celebrated every July, the Naadam Festival originated as a display of Mongol warriors' strength, agility, and strategic skill. Modern celebrations highlight traditional games (horse racing, wrestling, and archery), music, dance, and regional cuisine.

At UN COP 17, local herders organized a Mini Naadam to share their rich heritage, local food, and craftsmanship with international attendees.

Comfort in the Countryside

At the Mongol Nomad Resort Camp, our team incorporated a traditional nomadic experience, providing essential cultural immersion and context. This experience allowed us to observe traditional place-based resilience strategies (e.g., burning argal (dried cattle dung) as a source of fuel) and establish collaborative relationships with local knowledge holders.



Smoking meat over argal.



Altanzaya and a herder.

Overall, this trip signified an important experience to share results from our research project based in Erdenet, Mongolia, as well as further connect with and learn from Mongolian culture and knowledge holders.

