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## Saudi Arabia Convenes Arab States Ministerial to Bolster Drought Resilience and Land Restoration



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*Incoming United Nations CCD COP16 Presidency urges increased international action to address crises of land degradation, desertification and drought*

**20 October 2024:** During a week of key ministerial meetings in Jeddah involving countries from across the MENA region, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has called for Arab states to intensify land restoration and drought resilience initiatives. It comes as Saudi Arabia's incoming presidency of the 16<sup>th</sup> UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP16) ramps up international

engagement to address land degradation, desertification and drought, ahead of the key global conference taking place in Riyadh in December.

“COP16 in Riyadh will be the largest UNCCD COP to date, and the first to be held in the Middle East region. It is a crucial moment to ensure the voices of Arab states are heard, and pressing concerns regarding land degradation, desertification and drought are addressed.”

“The Arab region is witnessing severe environmental challenges, including drought, and sand and dust storms, with many people devastated by reduced agricultural yields, water scarcity, and biodiversity loss. At COP16 in Riyadh, we urge all parties to come together to deliver international action on these pressing issues that impact both the region, and the world.”

A host of key meetings took place this week in Jeddah to address regional environmental concerns, including the 35th session of the Council of Arab environment ministers, attended by senior government representatives from 22 countries in the region.

Saudi Arabia also hosted the first ministerial council meeting of the Middle East Green Initiative, with a pledge to plant 50 billion trees across the region, 10 billion of which will be planted in Saudi Arabia. The project aims to restore 200 million hectares of degraded land, and meet 5% of global afforestation goals.

Attention also turned to Saudi Arabia's incoming Presidency of the UNCCD COP16, with Executive Secretary of the UNCCD, Ibrahim Thiaw, addressing attendees. During a keynote speech he highlighted the regions vulnerability to drought and land degradation, whilst urging governments, businesses and communities to invest more in land restoration and drought resilience.

During proceedings on Thursday, an invitation was extended to countries and relevant organizations to participate in an investment event taking place during COP16 in Riyadh on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December. Called the Ecosystems event, it will outline a regional investment framework that integrates the restoration of land ecosystems with sustainable development solutions.

More generally, Arab countries and organizations were also called upon to actively participate in COP16 Riyadh, including at daily Arab Group meetings during the conference, and to help ensure the crucial UNNCD COP delivers robust international action. This included participation in the negotiating track, high-level meetings, and side events being held in the blue and green zones.

Already, 3.2 billion people around the world are impacted by land degradation. Whilst 2 billion tonnes of sand and dust, the equivalent of 350 Great Pyramids of Giza, enter the atmosphere every year according the UNCCD. Over 25% of this is due to human activity. COP16 will take place in Riyadh in December, and aims to mobilize governments, businesses, NGOs and financial

institutions to accelerate action on land restoration, drought resilience, sand and dust storms, and land tenure rights.