

# A global call for a United Nations International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists



## Proposal for An International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists Mongolia

*The proposal was endorsed and signed for future consideration  
by Mr. ULAAN CH., Minister for Food, Agriculture and Light Industry of Mongolia,  
in 11 June, 2019, Ulaanbaatar, MONGOLIA*

### Executive summary

More than half of the Earth's land surface is classified as *rangeland*, those lands on which the indigenous vegetation is predominantly grasses, forbs or shrubs that are or can be grazed, and which are used as a natural ecosystem for raising grazing livestock and wildlife. The health,

productivity and environmental sustainability of these lands are directly critical to the livelihoods and cultures of more than 500 million pastoralists, including agro-pastoralists, rangers, and animal keepers around the world.

Billions more benefits from these systems for tourism, wildlife and biodiversity, meat and milk and other agricultural products, mining, renewable energy and other uses. To increase knowledge and understanding about these ecosystems and the people who rely on them, the Government of Mongolia proposes to establish the observance by the United Nations (UN) of an

### ***International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists.***

Rangelands are faced with increasingly erratic climates, rapidly increasing human populations in some countries and rapidly declining or even abandonment in others, and a fast pace of unsustainable land-use change. But in recent years, an increasing appreciation of the value of pastoralism and transhumance for maintaining healthy rangelands has led to innovative approaches and technologies for sustainability of pastoralism. These landscapes and livelihoods need urgent attention from many sectors (e.g. agriculture, environment, health, education, trade) and many stakeholders (e.g. policymakers, herders, land managers, environmentalists, legislators, businesspeople, scientists, civil society, youth and women).

An International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) can provide the impetus and momentum necessary for a worldwide understanding of the importance of these lands to global food security and environmental services. It can call attention to the need for sustainable management and restoration, and enlightened policies in both developed and developing countries, enhance the perceived natural and cultural values of rangelands and pastoral livelihood systems, enhance pastoralists' rights and pride in their own cultural systems and traditions (especially among youth), and foster innovation towards sustainability and overcoming poverty. An IYRP can enhance governments' awareness and capacities to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other global development and environmental goals in such marginal areas.

### **Suggested action by the Committee**

Building on the momentum the UN Decade on Family Farming 2019–2028 and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration in 2021–2030, and the International Year of Camelids 2024, there is an urgent need to raise awareness on the challenging future facing pastoralists' livestock production systems and the rangelands they depend on – multi-faceted challenges that are different and very severe among such remote and mobile populations, including access to health and education services, access to economic inputs and markets, land-tenure security, conflict resolution, and investment in rangeland ecosystem improvement.

The Committee is invited to:

- a) Review the proposal made by the Government of Mongolia in partnership with Ethiopia, Argentina, Australia, Iran and Spain to establish the observance of an International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists, and provide guidance as deemed appropriate;
- b) Review and amend the draft Conference Resolution as presented in Appendix A.

## I. **B**ackground

### A. **D**efining rangelands and pastoralists

More than half of the Earth's land surface is classified as *rangeland*<sup>1</sup>, those lands on which the indigenous vegetation is predominantly grasses, grass-like plants, forbs or shrubs that are grazed or have the potential to be grazed, and which are used as a natural ecosystem for raising grazing livestock and wildlife. Rangelands may include native grasslands, savannas, shrublands, pasturelands, woodlands, wetlands, deserts, steppes, pampa, llanos, cerrado, campos, veld, tundra, alpine communities and marshes<sup>2</sup>.

The health and productivity of these lands are directly critical to the livelihoods and cultures of more than 500 million pastoralists around the world, many of whom are indigenous peoples. Pastoralists are people who raise livestock or semi-domesticated animals on rangelands, including ranchers, nomads and transhumant herders<sup>3</sup>.

### B. **R**angelands and pastoralists are custodians of sustainable development

Pastoral agriculture is a way of life for many communities in worldwide and over time it has evolved and supported environmental protection of rangeland landscapes and herders' livelihoods. For example, in Mongolia as of 2017, one-third of the national labor force was employed in pastoral agriculture and the sector comprised 8.4 percent of the country's exports and 24 percent of its GDP. Within the agriculture sector, almost 83 percent of total production comes from the traditional pastoral livestock sector, which includes 66.5 million herds, with average of 390 herds per herder's family and totally occupying 72 percent of the country's territory. Nomadic livestock husbandry has developed in its long history in harmony with nature and the environment to adapt to the harsh climatic conditions of rangelands. Healthy rangelands provide important benefits to humans, such as food security, medicine, local and regional economies, tourism, and they are critical for supporting ecosystem services, such as nutrient

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<sup>1</sup> "A case of benign neglect: Knowledge gaps about sustainability in pastoralism and rangelands", UN Environment, CRID, 2018

<sup>2</sup> *The International Terminology for Grazing Lands and Grazing Animals*, 2011. (<http://globalrangelands.org>)

<sup>3</sup> (IUCN/UNEP 2014 - [http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/wisp\\_green\\_economy\\_book.pdf](http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/wisp_green_economy_book.pdf)).

cycling, oxygen production, wildlife habitat, biological diversity and soil formation. For Mongolians and many other nations pastoralism is their culture, tradition and historical heritage, which was transferred from generation to generation. Currently more than 300 herders, where representing all provinces of Mongolia, supporting for the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists by signing to the proposal (Annex A).

Regulatory ecosystem services of rangelands include water purification, protection of soil from sand and water erosion, and flood protection. Recent evidence points to the higher productivity of rangelands under sustainable pastoralism than other land uses. Pastoralism is increasingly recognized as one of the most sustainable production systems on the planet and plays a major role in safeguarding ecosystems and biodiversity in natural grasslands and rangelands<sup>4</sup>.

### **C. Conversion of rangelands and pastoralism**

Conversion of native grasslands to produce soy and other crops, and feed for livestock, is among the greatest threats to these ecosystems. Unhealthy and unproductive rangelands, native grasslands and pasturelands/grasslands destabilize countries, endanger national security, compromise economic productivity and rob our youngest generation of opportunities for a prosperous future. Often their conversation may result in short term gains, but long-term environment disasters such as the 1930's Dust Bowl of the American and Canadian prairies and Yellow dust storms forming in Asia, due to desertification and land degradation. Many forces threaten the productivity and ecological integrity of these lands and their caretakers. Common threats in both developed and developing countries include: restrictions on moving or rotating animals, programs to settle pastoralists, unsustainable grazing practices, expansion of arable cropping into areas best suited as rangeland, breakdown of common property systems, land fragmentation, generational succession and rural exodus<sup>5</sup>, damaging fire, invasive plants, and harmful subsidies and policies.

Land degradation and desertification are intensifying in many parts of the world on account of climate change, overgrazing, infertile cultivated land and mining activities, among other causes. For example, in Mongolia as of 2015, land degradation and desertification have become a concern for 76.8% of the total territory, including 22.9% of which is severely affected. The land for mining has expanded because the areas with mining licenses were increased. According to the measurements throughout the territory of Mongolia for the period 1940–2016 without any interruptions or gaps, the average annual air temperature has increased by 2.2°C and warming has much intensified, in particular, since 1988. According to the assessment of climate change on

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<sup>4</sup>“A case of benign neglect: Knowledge gaps about sustainability in pastoralism and rangelands“, UN Environment, CRID, 2018

<sup>5</sup> In many developed countries, but also increasingly in developing countries, the younger generation is unable or unwilling to take over their family operations.

the country's environment and socio-economic sectors, pastoral animal husbandry and farming are highly impacted<sup>6</sup>

#### **D. Access to development**

Having been impacted by “benign neglect”<sup>7</sup> in many developing countries for many generations, pastoralists are among the poorest and most marginalized. Rural services barely reach them. Mobile pastoralists such as nomads and transhumant herders face discrimination and conflict.

Products derived from rangelands such as meat and milk face intense competition from unsustainable intensive livestock systems. Essential ecosystems are destroyed when rainforests are converted to feed production. The unregulated use of growth hormones and pesticides, and unbalanced subsidies in commercial systems, can lead to unfair competition for pastoralists.

Many examples of sustainable pastoralist practices exist<sup>8</sup>. Such systems are critical to achieving food and water security as well as resilient local and national economies, and to improving environmental conditions such as carbon sequestration, biodiversity and protection of land and ecosystems.

#### **E. Crisis proportions**

However, rangelands and pastoralists are facing drying and increasingly erratic climates, rapidly increasing human populations, fast pace of unsustainable land-use changes and threats to ecosystems, and increasing conflicts associated with increasingly armed banditry, terrorism, drought and access to diminishing natural resources.

There are also growing public health concerns about over-consuming animal-source foods and the impact of livestock on the environment and growing economic inequalities and uncertainties. At the same time, these inequalities and uncertainties particularly of poor and marginalized pastoralists, and increasing conflicts associated with drought and access to diminishing natural resources. Therefore, these landscapes and livelihoods need urgent attention from many UN sectors (e.g. agriculture, environment, health, education, trade) and many stakeholders (e.g. policymakers, herders, land managers, environmentalists, legislators, businesspeople, scientists, civil society, youth and women).

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<sup>6</sup> State of Environment of Mongolia 2015–2016, MNET, Ulaanbaatar

<sup>7</sup> “A case of benign neglect: Knowledge gaps about sustainability in pastoralism and rangelands“, UN Environment, CRID, 2018

<sup>8</sup> See for example: <http://globalrangelands.org>; <http://rangelandsinitiative.org>

## II. **R**everance to UN System goals and actions

### A. **R**everance to Sustainable Development Goals

Pastoralists are explicitly recognized in the 2030 Agenda as a group of peoples who should benefit from achievement of the SDGs. Amongst all 17 SDGs, there is a cluster of SDGs critical in achieving sustainability of rangelands and pastoralism. Ensuring that all people have access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year (SDG 2) is the core goal, which depends on success in significantly reducing rural poverty (SDG 1) and increasing attention to the special needs of pastoral women, elderly and rural youth (SDG 5), while also ensuring inclusive education for all citizens, particularly, herders in remote rural areas with a limited access to information and learning opportunities (SDG 4). Empowering pastoralist women could be achieved through increasing their participation and leadership in decision-making over livestock production and incomes of rural communities (SDG 5).

Healthy and productive rangelands throughout the world are needed to realize the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially the targets for sustainable agriculture, water management, sustainable energy and economic growth, combating and adapting to climate change, and promoting sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems.

### B. **R**everance to UN and other partners

Despite their neglect, pastoralists and rangelands are receiving increasing attention from a number of UN agencies. FAO has the mandate to support the development of all food-related systems including pastoralism, and in recent years has increased its investment in this. The FAO Voluntary Guidelines of Good Governance and Tenure Technical Guide on “Improving governance of pastoral lands<sup>9</sup>” highlight the importance of land tenure security and the strengthening of pastoralist institutions. FAO’s Pastoralist Knowledge Hub advocates for sustainable pastoralism, pastoralist-friendly policies and a strong pastoralist civil society. This initiative supports the proposal for an IYRP through its events and communication channels.

The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) recognized the importance of sustainable pastoralism and responsible consumption of livestock during its second meeting in May 2016. In that meeting, 158 countries passed a resolution (UNEA L.24) on “Combating desertification, land degradation and drought and promoting sustainable pastoralism and rangelands”, calling among other things for raising global awareness.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5771e.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <http://web.unep.org/environmentassembly/ministerial-declaration-resolutions-and-decisions-unea-4>

As implementation process for this agenda, in the fourth meeting of UNEA in March 2019, Member States passed Resolution UNEP/EA .4/L.17 on: “Innovations on sustainable rangelands and pastoralism” submitted by the African Group of countries<sup>5</sup>. This resolution urges that Member States to strengthen global efforts to conserve and sustainably use rangelands in particular in the context of the UN General Assembly Resolution (A/RES/73/284) on the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration in 2021–2030, acknowledging ongoing global efforts to introduce a proposal for an IYRP to the FAO’s Committee on Agriculture.

The UNEA-4 resolution also welcomes the global and regional initiatives and efforts aimed at preventing and reversing the loss of biological diversity and ecosystem functions and services and taking note of the substantive body of work on rangelands and pastoralism under UN organizations such as the Food and Agricultural Organization and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

The UNCCD urges “development and implementation of national and regional policies, programs and measures to prevent, control and reverse land degradation and mitigate the effects of drought through scientific and technological excellence, raising public awareness..., thereby contributing to poverty reduction.” Improved pastoral systems can reverse the destructive effects of drought and create economic opportunity for rural populations.

As recommended by UNEP gap analysis report need to implement regional and global integrated data assessment on pastoralists and rangelands in order to support future strategies and actions for ecosystem sustainability and the green development at different levels.

In December 2016 during a side event at the Convention on Biological Diversity COP 13 in Cancun, 28 government and 48 civil society organizations signed a strong statement that recognizes the value of rangelands, grasslands and pastoralism for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Some Governments have also declared their support for strengthening pastoral societies in the context of security and development (e.g. the N'Djamena Declaration of May 2013), and enhancing resilience (e.g. the Nouakchott Declaration of October 2013).

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) supports governments, pastoralists and mixed farming communities in negotiating and strengthening local solutions for rangeland governance including agreements securing pastoralists’ migratory routes, improving access to and management of water points, animal health services, and creating additional income opportunities, in particular for women, through new pastoralist products and markets. Its hosting of the International Land Coalition (ILC) including the ILC Rangelands Initiative is testimony to its commitment to securing lands for rural populations including pastoralists.

The International Land Coalition ( ILC) supports pastoralist networks of Civil Society Organizations ,CSO’s , in all regions of the world on sustainable rangelands management with securing tenure rights of rangelands for local communities , including poor, women and indigenous people. ILC also promoting inclusive decision making on rangeland use, effective actions against land grabbing and sustainable locally managed rangeland ecosystems.

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Many other national and international organizations are promoting similar positive actions and have joined together in establishing an International Support Group for the IYRP, showing their commitment to this event, including: International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), International Land Coalition (ILC), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Conservation International, International Rangeland Congress, International Grassland Congress, Society for Range Management (USA and Australia), IPICYT (Mexico), networks such as CELEP (Coalition of European Lobbies for Eastern African Pastoralism) and many international and national NGOs and CSOs.

### III. **O**bjectives of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists

#### A. **A**wareness raising

An IYRP will increase a worldwide understanding of the importance of these lands to global food security and environmental services, and call attention to the need for sustainable management and enlightened policies in both developed and developing countries.

It can enhance the perceived natural and cultural values of rangelands and pastoral livelihood systems, enhance pastoralists' rights and pride in their own cultural systems and traditions (especially among youth) and foster innovation towards sustainability and overcoming poverty. It can boost efforts for investment in restoration and rehabilitation of degraded rangelands, native grasslands and pasturelands.

Furthermore, an IYRP can enhance governments' awareness of and capacities to deliver on the SDGs and other global development and environmental goals in rangelands. It can allow low-forest-cover countries to demonstrate their commitments to the UN climate change agreements and to more accurately quantify their nationally determined contributions, all of which can enhance their ability to access multilateral funding such as through the Global Climate Fund, Global Environment Facility, World Bank, IFAD etc.

It can encourage those countries with a large area under rangelands to exchange experiences, share best practices, and perhaps form a network or caucus to continue to enhance awareness on rangelands and pastoralists well beyond the designated year.

## **B. Growing recognition**

The IYRP initiative builds on a recognition that development actions in rangelands need to be sustainable and benefit pastoralists equitably. A growing global pastoralist movement has emerged over the past decade and has made a number of calls for increased international recognition for their culture and land-use system.

Pastoralist organizations, communities and herders in many countries are requesting and supporting to declare IYRP. Global gatherings of pastoralist have issued declarations for such recognition, for example in Segovia, Spain (2007), Gujarat, India (2010), in Kenya (2013), in Rome, Italy (2016) and at the 8<sup>th</sup> Multi Stakeholder Partnership Meeting of Global Agenda for Sustainable Livestock in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia (2018). Therefore they will take center stage in all activities for sustainable rangelands and pastoralism under the IYRP objective. During the proposal development period more than 20 international, regional and national organizations worldwide supporting the Mongolian proposal for the declaration by UN the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (Annex B).

The heightened profile resulting from an IYRP will help pastoralist associations and networks to have a more visible profile and platform to press for their rights to development, to establish National Days on rangelands and pastoralists, improve legal recognition of rangelands and pastoralists, exchange best practices and solutions to problems, and revive/reinforce cultural traditions and diversity.

## **C. National and international actions**

A work plan will be developed that will consist of both national and international actions. Each month of the International Year could highlight a special theme, such as: the importance of rangelands, grasslands and pastoralists; improving legal and policy base on land-tenure security; social and economic services for pastoralists; climate change and resilience; biodiversity and ecosystem services; soils, water and land use; sustainable consumption and production of livestock; indigenous and local knowledge and innovation; women and youth; sustainable technologies.

Examples of activities that could be undertaken by countries and partners are:

- (1) National-level events, including showcasing successful sustainable pastoral systems, awards and prizes, technology fairs, video documentaries, a National Day of Pastoralists and Rangelands and World Herder Day, educational material, etc.;
- (2) An international conference on SDGs and their impact on pastoralists and rangelands, bringing together environmental, social and economic aspects in an integrated vision;

(3) Launching of actions aimed at implementing the recommendations of the UN Environment Gap Analysis on knowledge and information about rangelands and pastoralists and the UNEA-4 Resolution L.17;

(4) International social media campaigns and video productions to raise awareness of producers, consumers and policymakers worldwide;

(5) Pastoralist gatherings sponsored by several initiatives and networks, such as FAO Pastoralist Knowledge Hub to share local knowledge and strategize practical solutions.

## IV. **A**ppendix A

### A. **D**raft FAO Conference Resolution

*Recognizing* that healthy grassland and rangeland ecosystems are vital for contributing to economic growth, resilient livelihoods and the sustainable development of pastoralism; regulating the flow of water; maintaining soil stability and biodiversity; and supporting carbon sequestration, tourism, and other ecosystem goods and services, as well as distinct lifestyles and cultures,

*Aware* that a significant proportion of the earth's terrestrial surface is classified as rangeland and grassland, that these biomes dominate land cover in dryland countries and countries affected by desertification, that a significant number of pastoralists in the world inhabit rangelands and grasslands, and that pastoralism is globally practiced in many different forms,

*Recognizing* that pastoralism is a dynamic and transformative system linked to the diverse cultures, identities, traditional knowledge, historical experience of coexisting with nature, and distinct way of life of indigenous peoples and local communities across the globe,

*Also recognizing* that rangelands and pastoralists, having contributed to enhancing and maintaining biodiversity, food security and sustainable management of rangelands, face urgent and different challenges around the world, including: widespread land degradation, loss of biodiversity, increasing vulnerability to climate change; lack of strong policy and legal base and land tenure insecurity; insufficient investment; inequitable development; inadequate levels of literacy; lack of adequate and relevant technology, infrastructure and access to markets; unsustainable changes in the use of land and natural resources; forced migration from and

abandonment of rangelands; limited access to social and extension services; and faced with insecurity of both the pastoralists and the communities through which they traverse,

*Acknowledging* that efforts aimed at achieving sustainable rangelands and pastoralism need to be rapidly up-scaled so as to make significant impact in achieving all Sustainable Development Goals in drylands, mountains, Arctic circle, and other areas used by pastoralists; and that an International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralism in 2026 would help to provide the necessary attention and investment required for achieving such urgent change by 2030,

*Noting* that urgent and appropriate legal protection is needed of collective and individual land and natural resources, in order to manage grazing areas, wildlife, water sources livestock movement, risk and resilience, and to enable land-use planning and ecosystem management by pastoralists and relevant public entities,

*Also noting* that well-developed and fair production value chains that can help provide equitable economic opportunities and end extreme poverty among many pastoralists, will require the development of appropriate market infrastructure, information and communication channels; value-addition and niche businesses built on sustainable and healthy livestock products; appropriate health and trade regulations; certification systems and payments for environmental services; and an enabling environment providing for multiple use of land (livestock, conservation, tourism, mining, renewable energy, etc.),

*Recognizing* the significant contributions being made by the scientific community, non-governmental organizations, indigenous peoples organizations, pastoralist associations, and other relevant civil society actors; including innovative approaches towards achieving sustainability,

*Further recognizing* the relevance of sustainable rangelands and pastoralism to several subprograms and thematic areas of the United Nations, including the Food and Agricultural Organizations, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, and International Fund for Agricultural Development, and acknowledging their collaborative efforts with intergovernmental and civil-society partners,

1. *Decides* to declare 2026 the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists so as to raise global awareness of these resources.
2. *Invites* the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Environment Programme, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development, mindful of provisions contained in the annex to Economic and Social Council resolution 1980/67, and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and Drought, to assist in facilitating the implementation of the Year in collaboration with Governments,

relevant organizations, non-governmental organizations, civil society, and all other relevant stakeholders;

3. *Invites* the scientific community and civil society to actively participate in implementation of the Year in collaboration with the United Nations and governments, in particular through new and innovative research, knowledge generation, monitoring and assessments, to be disseminated through relevant global congresses, assemblies, social media and business community;
4. *Invites* the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the United Nations Environment Assembly to keep the General Assembly informed of progress in this regard, bearing in mind paragraphs 23 to 27 of the annex to Economic and Social Council resolution 1980/67, on activities resulting from the implementation of the present resolution, which elaborates on, inter alia, the evaluation of the Year;
5. *Stresses* that the costs of all activities that may arise from the implementation of the present resolution above and beyond activities currently within the mandate of the lead agencies should be met through voluntary contributions, including from civil society and the private sector;
6. *Requests* the Director General to submit this Resolution to the Secretary General of the United Nations;
7. Recommends the present Resolution to the General Assembly for adoption.

## v. **A**nnexes

A. **L**ist of Mongolian herders signed for the support for an International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists

B. **S**upport letters of International, regional and national organization's to the request from the Government of the Mongolia for an International Year Rangelands and Pastoralists