

UNFCCC Side Event Speaking for IYRP

Good evening distinguished delegates,

I am Elena Chen. It is an honour to speak on behalf of the Global Alliance of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists IYRP 2026. Our Alliance works to raise global recognition of rangelands and pastoral communities — systems that, much like mountain ecosystems, operate through mobility and ecological variability, building resilience by functioning in step with nature, rather than against it.

We believe that it is critical to integrate mountains in the international climate regime. We were excited to see that the first Expert Dialogue on Mountains and Climate Change was held in SB60 2024. Therefore, we, here at Belem, express our sincere gratitude to the Secretariat, the government of Adorra, the Mountain Partnership, OIKOS, and all the delegations who support this initiative.

As we gather here to highlight mountains, we wish to draw attention to the rangelands that surround, sustain, and connect them. Rangelands are landscapes where herders have maintained life and productivity for centuries, cultivating their mobility and deep ecological knowledge. Not just herders, in fact, rangelands have vital influence on mountain ecology, water cycles, and biodiversity far beyond their borders.

Mountain rangelands are among the most climate-sensitive ecosystems. There, herders live in step with high-altitude, snowmelt, and seasonality — their mobility mirroring the ecological pulse of mountain systems. By aligning with climate variability rather than resisting it, pastoralists sustain soil health, biodiversity, and maintain a symbiotic relationship with nature.

Pastoralists read landscapes the way meteorologists read data — through continuous observation, interpretation, and adaptive decision-making — a living science of navigating variability, crucial for mountains where climatic unpredictability is the rule, not the exception.

However, their contributions have remained largely invisible in global climate frameworks. Just as mountain ecosystems are side-lined in international climate discussions, rangelands, and pastoral systems — which often buffer and connect these mountain zones — are rarely recognized as nature-based solutions for resilience and adaptation.

Many existing climate frameworks still tend to misread the roles of pastoralists— portraying them as victims or emitters rather than as climate allies. This misunderstanding leads to misguided interventions, such as sedentarization, fixed water points, exclusionary conservation, or carbon projects that fragment rangelands. These responses not only displace communities but dismantle the ecological systems that make mountain resilience possible.

To correct this, we must modify the existing practices, integrating rangeland and pastoralist priorities into mountain and climate policy — starting here at COP30.

Three shifts are crucial:

1. Fund mobility as climate adaptation: Mobility, herd diversity, and collective governance are pastoralists' natural resilience infrastructure — they deserve climate finance, not restriction.
2. Differentiate emissions: Whereas fossil-fuel emissions release carbon from the deep past into the present, extracting it from underground and adding it to the atmosphere; pastoral livestock emissions recycle carbon that is already circulating within short-term biological cycles. Confusing these will undermine climate justice and penalise climate-compatible systems.

Pastoralism is an ecologically integrated system that works with variability. Pastoral livestock operate within short-cycle carbon processes, contributing to ecological balance rather than adding new carbon to the atmosphere. Through mobility, herders align their herds with shifting patterns of forage and water, enabling natural regeneration and maintaining soil, vegetation, and biodiversity. By following seasonal rhythms and managing risk collectively, pastoralist systems sustain both livelihoods and the ecosystems that depend on their mobility.

3. Protect pastoralist knowledge and rights: Loss and Damage mechanisms, adaptation funds, and transparency frameworks must include mobile communities and their institutions. Without this inclusion, we risk silencing some of the most climate-resilient voices on Earth.

Things were changing. In 2022, the Government of Mongolia, supported by a coalition of over 60 countries, delivered a proposal of having an international year to recognize rangelands and pastoralists at the United Nations General Assembly. This resolution called on the world to value the contributions of pastoralists and rangelands to sustainable development, climate resilience, and cultural heritage.

Since then, the IYRP Global Alliance, uniting 102 countries, 400 organizations including research institutions, and civil society across regions, has been working to prepare for 2026 — both as a year of celebration, and as a turning point for policy and recognition on rangeland civilization.

The recently launched IYRP policy brief, “Powered by Variability”, reminds us that pastoralism is inherently climate-adapted. Where industrial agriculture seeks control and predictability, pastoralism specializes in managing uncertainty — turning climate variability into productivity.

As we approach 2026, we have a unique opportunity to bridge the mountain and rangeland agendas. Both depend on ecological variability, both sustain water, soil, and biodiversity far beyond their borders, and both show us that coexistence with change is possible.

Recognizing pastoralists as partners in regenerative futures is essential if we are to meet the Global Goal on Adaptation with justice.

From conferences to the steppes, mountains and rangelands remind us that true resilience lies not in resisting change, but in transforming with it — with wisdom, balance, and hope.

Thank you.