



**STATEMENT BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE  
CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY,**

**MS. CRISTIANA PAȘCA PALMER,**

**AT THE TWENTY-SECOND MEETING OF THE SUBSIDIARY BODY ON  
SCIENTIFIC, TECHNICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADVICE**

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**Madam Chair,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,**

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to Montreal for the 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice to the Convention. I hope that the change from the snow-filled sidewalks, sub-zero temperatures, and barren trees that surrounded us when we last met in December, to this hot summer weather will kindle our spirits and energize us for the intense work in front of us this week to achieve what we set out to do.

Let me take this opportunity to also congratulate you, and all of us, for the twenty-fifth anniversary of our Convention! We have come a long way since 1992's Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, and we have a lot to be proud of. Throughout this time, SBSTTA, through its constructive and productive outcomes and its considered deliberations, has contributed tremendously to the advancement and development of the Biodiversity Convention. So, a round of applause for you all!

This edition of SBSTTA is historical because, for the first time, the Subsidiary body will consider items from the two protocols of the Convention, providing thus an opportunity for greater coherence and efficiency between various streams of work under the Convention. It also brings a number of procedural requirements — in organizing discussions and affecting the election of new members of the Bureau. Let us recall that regions have to elect countries to the SBSTTA Bureau that are also Parties to the protocols or have to nominate alternates.

Madam Chair, I would like to thank you, and your colleagues in the Bureau of the Subsidiary Body, for your excellent leadership in shaping this meeting. Allow me to also thank the Governments of Australia, Canada, Finland, Japan, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden, as well as the European Commission and Tourisme Montréal for providing generous financial resources to support the participation of representatives of developing countries, countries with economy in transition and representatives of indigenous peoples and local communities. Today, we have over 1,100 participants who pre-registered from 144 Governments — a record number, indicating the growing interest in the biodiversity agenda and its fragility in the complex world we live in.

This allows for more voices to be heard and views to be taken on board. It is only through the full participation of Parties and the inclusive engagement of indigenous peoples, local communities and all the other relevant stakeholders that we can collectively ensure the meaningful and catalytic advancement of the objectives that all Parties committed to under the Convention.

In this regard, we are very grateful for all the support and would like to encourage all countries in a position to do so to continue to provide financial support to ensure inclusive participation for future meetings of the Convention.

My thanks also go to the Government of Canada for supporting the reception for all of you this evening. I also take this opportunity to wish a Happy Canada Day to our host and friends in Canada.

**Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,**

Allow me to take this opportunity to briefly update you on activities over the last six months, since our previous SBSTTA meeting.

First, to facilitate preparations for discussions on in-depth programmatic areas of work, we mobilized different measures, including data assessments, partnerships and action under other initiatives. The focus is to ensure that the implementation of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets is moving in the right direction. Indeed, though only two more years are left from the timeframe of the current Strategic Plan, it is my firm belief that many actions could still be taken to implement the Strategic Plan and bring us closer to meeting the Aichi Targets.

I have made this a central message in all my engagements and outreach with ministers and senior leadership from CBD Parties, encouraging them to accelerate efforts to implement their national commitments under CBD. And I am happy that the message resonates and we see progress if we take the example of Canada alone and the commitment of the Trudeau Government this past March to invest 1.3 billion Canadian dollars over five years to conserve land, waterways and wildlife and protect species at risk. This is an excellent way for Canada to celebrate its 25-year membership in the United Nations Biodiversity Convention! Canada has once again demonstrated that it is leading by example when it comes to meeting the objectives of the Convention. For every dollar spent by parks agencies, six dollars are returned to Canada's gross domestic product.

Mexico, the country that ensured a very good Presidency for the Conference of the Parties in the last two years, has also demonstrated that it is a world leader in recognizing the value of biodiversity for the future of its people. Last month, President Enrique Peña Nieto signed 10 landmark decrees creating hundreds of water reserves, guaranteeing water supplies for 45 million people for the next 50 years. President Peña Nieto also enacted a general law on sustainable forest management. I applaud the Government's commitment to protecting nature and, as we approach the next United Nations Biodiversity Conference, in Egypt, I hope these measures and leadership will be an inspiration to many others.

Second, we continued the reflections on the preparations for discussions on the post-2020 framework. A paper in this regard, outlining the process will be discussed during the second meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation next week. At the same time, we followed up on SBSTTA's conclusions from December 2017 regarding the need for transformative change to be further explored. With the generous support of the Government of Switzerland, and I would like to thank Switzerland again, we convened in March this year the second dialogue on transformative change, an informal brainstorming exercise which generated vivid discussions and ideas. We are keen to share this knowledge with all of you.

In this regard, we will organize on Sunday, 8 July, a seminar on the ICAO premises to brief Parties on the issues covered in the two dialogues hosted by Switzerland and thus provide further opportunities to exchange views and provide insights on the post-2020 process prior to the second meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation. I hope you all received the invitation and the background package and will plan to attend. The session will feature the three key presenters from Switzerland, including a distinguished colleague from our sister Convention, UNFCCC, Mr. Halldor Thorgeirsson, who has deep knowledge about the architecture and development of the Paris Agreement, and Professor Derk Loorbach from the Dutch Research Institute for Transitions.

**Dear colleagues,**

The science is clear and the alarm bells are ringing! The loss of biodiversity and the destruction of ecosystems continue at unprecedented rates. The recent IPBES regional assessments reports launched in March this year present a worrying picture in all regions of the world.

Some 20 per cent of Africa's land surface (6.6 million square kilometres) is estimated to be degraded because of soil erosion, salinization, pollution and loss of vegetation or soil fertility, resulting in significant loss of nature's contributions to people.

For Europe and Central Asia, the report finds that abandonment of traditional land-use systems, and loss of associated indigenous and local knowledge and practices, have been widespread. Production-based subsidies driving growth in agricultural, forestry and natural resource extraction sectors tend to exacerbate conflicting land-use issues, often impinging on available territory for traditional users. Maintenance of traditional land use and lifestyles in Europe and Central Asia is strongly related to institutional adequacy and economic viability.

Generally, the findings of the reports indicate that further economic growth can facilitate sustainable development only if it is decoupled from the degradation of biodiversity and nature's capacity to contribute to people. Such decoupling, however, has not yet happened and would require far-reaching change in policies and tax reforms at the global and national levels.

Furthermore, the World Economic Forum's *Global Risk Report* listed ecological collapse, together with biodiversity loss, among the top global risks in terms of impact. I invited Mr. Dominic Waughray, the Senior Director for Environment at the World Economic Forum to share his views with all of us during the 8 July seminar.

While the current Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets represent important agreements on policy ambitions, commitments and actions, these have been insufficient in halting biodiversity loss and arresting the destruction of valuable ecosystems. Ecological resilience research indicates that planetary boundaries are at risk of being crossed. In some cases, and this includes biodiversity, they have already been breached, with the potential acceleration of environmental disruption causing cascading effects on the functions and compositions of our ecosystems, shifting species migrations and aggravating climate impacts.

As we all know, ecosystem destruction is further aggravated by other global changes — climate change, water and urbanization, to name just a few — while, in turn, it compounds and contributes to further exacerbate food security, health and climate challenges. It is a vicious circle that we cannot escape with measures taken in isolation!

The complexity of the interdependencies between human social and economic systems and the natural Earth's systems require interconnected measures and solutions. Indeed, we need to perhaps go back to the drawing board and address biodiversity challenges through the lens of the Earth systems approach. We cannot resolve to halt the biodiversity crisis with isolated and siloed solutions.

At the heart of the matter is our current economic development paradigm. The neoclassical development and economic growth models that dominate the way policies are being developed and implemented misses the fact that human development is constrained by the ecological limits of the planet. Our economic model is rooted in unsustainable consumption and production patterns, and neglects to incorporate the costs of natural capital losses and the benefits stemming from nature's numerous ecosystem services.

As biodiversity and ecosystems provide the essential infrastructure supporting life on Earth and human development, it should come naturally that considerations about biodiversity are placed at the centre of economic and social assessments, as well as political decision-making.

The stark reality, though, is that biodiversity is far from being a prime preoccupation in the circles outside the community of experts. Or not yet! We need to build a strong scientific (and economic) case to make convincing arguments to demonstrate the *relevance* of biodiversity to ministers of finance and the investment and business community. At the Secretariat, we started to reach out increasingly to these key actors because we recognize that, without their buy-in and involvement in addition to top government and political decision makers, we will not see a sea-tide transformative change in the way decisions and actions that impact ecosystems are taken and implemented.

As we start SBSTTA-22 deliberations, it is essential to keep in mind the three objectives of the Convention – conservation, sustainable use and equitable sharing of benefits – and that we have all agreed to a vision of Living in Harmony with Nature by 2050. To make that vision a reality and not just nice words on paper, we need robust science, as well as technical and technological guidance, to demonstrate the practical solutions

that biodiversity provides for many sustainable development priorities and help us craft sustainability pathways to guide transformative change at all levels.

SBSTTA's deliberations over the coming week are essential to providing the scientific knowledge and information for building a strong case for biodiversity. We also increasingly hear the call for evidence-based and science-based approaches to target-setting in the post-2020 biodiversity framework.

Your recommendations on the Convention's areas of work will become part of the global community's solutions and innovations to safeguard Life on Earth.

### **Distinguished delegates**

The risks of humans undermining their own existence are very real, and it is time for the voice of scientists on biodiversity to be heard just as loud and clear as that of climate change!

And that involves not just biologists and conservation scientists, but also economists, social and behavioural scientists, and engineers.

To avoid the catastrophic collapse of planetary systems, we must come together as a community of scientists and practitioners, working across disciplines, to address the root causes of ecosystem destruction and explore innovative solutions and approaches that maybe were not tried before. We must synthesize existing scientific evidence to assess where we have gaps in knowledge and need more evidence. But, above all, we must communicate much better the implications of our choices, at all levels.

Having an interdisciplinary science background myself, I recognize that, often, the thorough knowledge and analysis done by scientists remains captured in the small circle of expertise and does not reach out to touch the hearts and minds of people. Additionally, language barriers prevent wide dissemination of science developed at the national level. How many of you know of excellent scientific work done by the experts in your countries, but which does not often make it to international academic publications? We really need to be able to tap into all these sources of knowledge, including from traditional knowledge and indigenous communities, which is also very valuable.

Scientists have the daunting task of perhaps sometimes getting out of their comfort zone and improving the way science is being communicated — not an easy challenge.

I want to close by saying that, in English, the “elephant in the room” is an idiom for an obvious truth that is being ignored. A proverb in Africa says: “A gentle hand may lead even an elephant by a hair”.

Let us work hard so that biodiversity is no longer “the elephant in the room” and that “robust science” is the gentle *but firm* hand that guides us on the path towards 2020 and beyond —the path of living in harmony with nature for real!

With this, I wish you successful deliberations, and I look forward to continuing to engage with all of you through these challenging but exciting times.

Thank you.

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