



**Statement of Ms. Cristiana Paşca Palmer  
Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity  
at the opening of the high-level segment  
of the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties  
Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, 14 November 2018**

On behalf of my team at the Secretariat, a warm welcome to Sharm El Sheikh.

Dear colleagues, it is customary and fully appropriate to start speeches like this with expressions of gratitude.

And, indeed, there are many among us that I want to rightly thank for their leadership. In particular, I want to thank H.E. Dr. Yasmine Fouad, the Minister of Environment of Egypt, for her partnership and leadership in hosting this year's Conference of the Parties, and for all her tireless work to lead on this issue in Egypt, in the region, and across the international community.

I also want to thank Khaled Fouad for his hospitality and welcoming us here.

And there also are so many of you in the audience who I would like to personally thank for your tireless efforts. I know that you have come from far and some from close by. I know that you all give so much day in and day out to this most vital of issues—to the preservation of all life on this planet, including that of our own species.

And yet, we must be mindful that, as a community, we are really not in a position in which we can simply thank ourselves for the very real progress that we have made. The stark reality is that, despite this progress, we are currently failing.

Despite all our many efforts, humanity is still rapidly destroying nature, the shared natural infrastructure and natural resources that support all forms of life on earth, human development, and well-being.

Now, you all know the statistics—I won't repeat them for you. But I will make this point: our crisis—the destruction of nature—is bound up in a series of multiple interlocking crises that are all afflicting all of humankind.

Everywhere, the old order is seemingly receding in a torrent of change: political, economic, social, and technological disruptions. Across almost every issue and institution, we see that, as a global society, we are vastly underprepared for what the World Economic Forum has called Globalization 4.0.

And so, as a global society, we are necessarily in the midst of a generational struggle to adapt our institutions to this new reality.

Everywhere, societal narratives must shift away from division and exclusion to the co-creation and co-sharing of benefits. In the coming age of robotics and artificial intelligence and with aging populations, we will also have to move away from the narrative of production and consumption towards one of co-sharing and co-caring. And we must ensure that our respective economic models design, create, and share prosperity in a way that are more inclusive, equitable and sustainable.

I raise these points because I want to stress that success in our area is bound up with success in these areas as well. The preservation and restoration of nature is unshakably linked with the preservation and restoration of humankind.

Even in the midst of this crisis, we must move beyond crisis management and adopt more of a transformative change. The only way that we can save nature—and save ourselves with it—is to co-design, co-create, and co-share the benefits of change in an inclusive and expansive way.

And so, we are gathered here at a pivotal moment. Twenty-five years ago, the Convention on Biological Diversity entered into force. We *can* point, over those 25 years, to meaningful progress on the protection and conservation of biodiversity. For example, the annual rate of net forest loss has been halved over the past ten years; global protected areas have increased to 13 per cent of coastal and marine areas and 15% of terrestrial areas; and the number of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture secured in conservation facilities has risen.

And yet, these successes are not enough to halt the ongoing loss of plant and animal diversity on Earth—a fundamental worldwide extinction crisis, deepening every year, and severely impacted by—and also severely driving—climate change.

To solve this crisis, we must take action on an unprecedented scale—from the ground up!—to preserve our common future. These 25 years have made it perfectly clear that the biodiversity crisis will not be solved by the biodiversity community working in isolation. We need to reach beyond this room—and reach into the homes and the hearts of all people on this planet. The solution must involve all of us.

That is why I am pleased that this meeting of the Conference of the Parties has representation from the 196 Parties to the Convention, and from our colleagues from the NGO community and the private sector—who are working together with us to make sure all sectors of the economy and of society play their part.

We have representation from national Governments and international organizations, and from colleagues at the subnational levels—regions and states, cities, towns, and villages of every shape and size—that want to work together to preserve our common future.

We have leadership from indigenous people and local communities—those who are closest to the land, whose survival is most at risk, and whose traditional knowledge and practices can also show us the way forward.

Let us not forget that we represent both our respective peoples and all people, and especially our youth. Our own publics and the global public wants us to succeed. They are present as well through the media, through online platforms, and through direct participation. And they will and must become more involved to preserve the future, as we mount renewed engagement efforts and public participation towards 2020 and beyond.

But this movement to save nature—and to save ourselves—must be expanded further. Together, those of us in this room must make the case—politically, economically, scientifically and morally—that since biodiversity and ecosystems provide the essential infrastructure supporting life on Earth and human development, they need to be placed at the centre of economic, social and political decision-making.

And we must do our part not just in our words but in our deeds. This meeting of the Conference of the Parties takes place in the final two years of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and the Strategic Plan that we adopted in 2010, and on which—again, despite real progress—we are falling short. We need to accelerate the achievement of these targets as we move towards 2020. To achieve this, actions are required to mainstream and integrate biodiversity in all relevant economic sectors, as well as in cross-cutting national policies, such as development plans and processes, budgets and economic policies.

Actions can and must also be taken not just by governments but by organizations at all levels of society, including businesses and individuals as producers and consumers. Through our choices and behaviours, as individuals and as actors in larger systems, we can all make a critical difference in safeguarding all life on the planet.

And we then must utilize that accelerated focus on the Aichi Targets to design a post-2020 global biodiversity framework in a transformative way. Our 2050 Vision is simple but profound: living in harmony with nature. We must realize this vision through an actionable and achievable framework. Conservation and sustainable development cannot just be something we discuss—they must be seen and felt in the everyday lives of all our citizens. We must demonstrate that nature is not just something “out there” and “set aside”. Nature is life! Nature is you! Nature is here! Nature is all of us!

As a unique species, we have the ability to imagine the future, and then create it. Success will depend on that vision and on the work that we all put into it from today and every day until 2020 and beyond.

2020 will mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. 2020 will also mark the five-year point of the Sustainable Development Goals, which are targeted towards the year 2030. And 2020 will mark a renewed focus for this process at the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties and, through it, for the future of humanity and nature itself.

Over the course of the next two weeks, and over the course of the next two years, we will be making decisions that impact not only the next two decades but the next two millenniums and beyond. May we all have the wisdom and courage to act accordingly. I count on your continued leadership and partnership.

Thank you.

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