



**Opening remarks of the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity
At the 2018 Business and Biodiversity Forum
Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, 14 November 2018**

Distinguished guests,

It is no accident that we are together here today: biodiversity represents our biological lifeline. Business represents our economic lifeline. And so, the partnership between our two sectors is key to shaping pathways to a sustainable future.

Our partnership has been built in the past several years: this is our second Business and Biodiversity Forum, and it has become a tradition within the Convention that will continue far beyond this meeting of the Conference of the Parties. Together, we have built a Global Platform for Business and Biodiversity with the support of and contributions from the Business and Biodiversity Partnership, which already has 21 national and regional initiatives.

The last forum secured commitments from over 100 companies towards our Business and Biodiversity pledge. The resulting Cancun Declaration focused on these sectors: agriculture, forestry and fisheries, and tourism. This meeting of the Conference of the Parties will focus on: energy, mining, infrastructure, manufacturing and processing, and health.

Let me give a special thanks to our co-organizers, the Government of Egypt under the auspices of H.E Dr. Sahar Nasr, Minister of Investment and International Cooperation, and H.E. Dr. Yasmine Fouad, Minister of Environment, and to Erik Solheim, the Executive Director of UN Environment.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We stand at a difficult moment for the fate of humanity -- and indeed of all species. But it is also a moment that offers new opportunities for leadership from all sectors, and crucially from the business sector, in securing our common future.

Indeed, the dialogue around business and biodiversity has grown-- and has the potential to change our economy, society and future by putting nature at the centre, because nature is indispensable for health, food and water systems, economy, and human security.

Last week, I was in Dubai attending the newly created Global Futures Council on Biodiversity and the Economy at the World Economic Forum. This week, you are holding this crucial gathering as part of the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biodiversity as we gear up towards our targets for 2020, 2030, and beyond, including our vision for 2050: living in harmony with nature.

It is essential that business leaders like yourselves continue to engage in — and expand — this dialogue, and that we all take meaningful action together. The stakes are immense, and so are the opportunities.

As you all know, as it now stands, we humans are rapidly destroying nature. We are destroying the shared natural infrastructure and natural resources that support life on earth, human development, and well-being.

Today, more than 77 per cent of land on Earth, excluding Antarctica, has been modified by humans, up from just 15 per cent a century ago. Vertebrate populations have declined by 60 per cent from their 1970 levels alone. Extinction rates are 1,000 times their natural — pre-industrial — rates.

Drivers of degradation continue to be fuelled by unsustainable agricultural and forestry practices expanding into natural habitats, climate change, invasive alien species, and pollution. Additionally, urban expansion, infrastructure development, and the impacts of extractive industries are taking a toll.

And the costs are profound. In economic costs alone, as the report of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services shows, ecosystem degradation costs more than 10 per cent of annual global gross domestic product. The costs to health, food and water, human security, and other critical priorities are likewise critical. Across the world, these losses hold populations back on their path to sustainable development. They also harm business and long-term growth.

But we have the knowledge, the skills and the new frameworks to change this path! And the business community has a critical leadership role to play.

Visionary businesses and financial sector entities are aware of the current opportunities and challenges and are making transformative change to turn risks into opportunities.

The potential costs of being left out of this movement for change are real. They include becoming trapped as a business in resource dependency and scarcity, losing investment, suffering brand reputation, and opening the window of governmental regulation. But this isn't just a question of mitigating these threats — it's about seizing the opportunity that a new way forward offers.

Acknowledging, accounting for, and promoting the sustainable use of biodiversity represents a critical business opportunity. Protecting biodiversity can increase market share, improve relationships with stakeholders, ensure the long-term viability of businesses, and enhance the loyalty of employees and customers alike.

The general public is growing more concerned with the challenges that our natural world is facing. Consumers, especially the younger and growing generations of consumers, are looking for more sustainable products. To capture these new consumers, businesses need to integrate sustainability into their business models, decision-making, sourcing and production methods.

And so, we need to mainstream biodiversity into decision-making across economic sectors. This will also be a foundational element of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

Forging stronger partnerships across governments and societies, including businesses, is key for achieving such mainstreaming. For some businesses, the interlinkages with biodiversity are very direct, while for others they are more visible along their supply chains or in the impacts of the use of their products. However, every business is in some way reliant on and impacts our natural resources, including biodiversity.

Our work is also a key part of achieving the realization of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which have biodiversity at their heart. Realization of the Sustainable Development Goals would open up US \$12 trillion of market opportunities in four core economic sectors alone: food and agriculture, cities, energy and materials, and health and well-being. Many of those opportunities relate to the potential solutions provided by nature.

Many businesses are already aware of their impacts and dependencies and have taken action. Today and tomorrow, you will hear practical experiences on how they are addressing pressing issues, and you will have an opportunity to look ahead at what is required to truly stop biodiversity loss.

We will also explore essential elements common for all sectors, such as partnerships, tools and finance. And we will consider biotrade and access to genetic resources and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of their utilization.

As you know, one of the main tasks of this United Nations Biodiversity Conference is to agree on a road map towards a post-2020 global framework for biodiversity. This post-2020 framework will be developed through a broad consultative process, with opportunities for inputs from all stakeholders, including businesses and the financial sector.

It will be critical for you as businesses to be actively engaged. This Forum will give us a global platform to strategize how this can best happen in the lead-up to 2020 and beyond. I would also like to invite more businesses to join the Business and Biodiversity Partnership.

I wish you productive discussions over the next two days, and I look forward to our strong partnership in the lead-up to 2020 and beyond.

Thank you.
