

UN BIODIVERSITY CONFERENCE: FRIDAY, 2 DECEMBER 2016

On Friday, 2 December 2016, the High-Level Segment (HLS) of the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP 13) opened in Cancún, Mexico, preceding the concurrent meetings of CBD COP 13, the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (COP-MOP 8) and the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization (COP-MOP 2). The meetings comprise the UN Biodiversity Conference.

Ministers and Heads of Delegation met in plenary in the morning. Two roundtables on agriculture and tourism convened in parallel in the afternoon.

PLENARY

Opening the HLS, Rafael Pacchiano Alamán, Minister of Environment and Natural Resources, Mexico, underscored the importance of mainstreaming biodiversity across different sectors, and expressed hope that the proposed Cancun Declaration on Mainstreaming the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity for Well-Being will achieve consensus. Discussing Strategic Goal A of the Aichi Targets (address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss by mainstreaming biodiversity across government and society), Chun Kyoo Park, Ministry of Environment, Republic of Korea, stressed that the global community is building a growing understanding of biodiversity's fundamental role in human livelihoods and prosperity. Miguel Ruíz Cabañas, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mexico, underscored the need to reverse current biodiversity loss trends, and called on the HLS to provide the necessary political will to address existing challenges.

Helen Clark, Administrator, UN Development Programme (UNDP), said that investing in biodiversity will yield higher returns at lower costs, offering multiple benefits and creating a safety net for the most vulnerable. Erik Solheim, Executive Director, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), stressed the economic value of biodiversity and the need for cross-sectoral approaches for its conservation, and announced the appointment of Cristiana Paşca Palmer, currently Minister of the Environment of Romania, as CBD Executive Secretary. Braulio de Souza Dias, CBD Executive Secretary, lauded the high levels of national reporting and work on National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), as well as increased integration across the three Rio Conventions.

Naoko Ishii, CEO and Chairperson, Global Environment Facility (GEF), pointed to the alarming rates of biodiversity loss as "the sixth extinction phase" and warned of unsustainable pressure on the global commons which constitute a non-negotiable foundation for future progress and prosperity. Taleb Rifai, Secretary General, UN World Tourism Organization, proposed focusing on local and regional efforts to protect biodiversity, accountability mechanisms, and investments that contribute to conservation.

María Helena Semedo, Deputy Director General, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), underscored the importance of biodiversity to increase food security and highlighted the need for coalitions and partnerships to reduce the biodiversity footprint of the agriculture sector supply chain. Patricia Espinoza, Executive Secretary, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), noted the importance of implementing climate change and biodiversity commitments to create economic opportunities for communities and address existing challenges.

Inger Andersen, Director General, IUCN, underscored global progress on marine protected areas (MPAs), and highlighted that investing in nature-based solutions create many returns, including for biodiversity protection, carbon sinks, jobs, business opportunities and social security. José Sarukhán, National Commission for the Knowledge and Use of Biodiversity of Mexico (CONABIO), underscored the importance of collaboration among governments, academia and other stakeholders to establish solid knowledge networks.

Gino Van Begin, Secretary General, ICLEI, called for a strong policy framework, capacity building, and increased collaboration and support for biodiversity action at the local level, unlocking cities' potential. Maria Eugenia Choque, Indigenous Women's and Biodiversity Network (IWBN) and the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), stressed the role of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) in resource management, noting that traditional knowledge is key for the sustainable management of biodiversity.

Elisa Romano Dezolt, Global Partnership for Business and Biodiversity, called on governments to create policy environments to enable mainstreaming across business sectors. Melina Sakiyama and Christian Schwarzer, Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN), welcomed the civil society and youth fora organized in the lead-up to the CBD meetings and presented the recommendations from their declarations, including on biodiversity education integrating gender, ethnic and vulnerable group perspectives.

ROUNDTABLE ON AGRICULTURE

Moderating the roundtable discussion on ways to best mainstream biodiversity into the food and agricultural sectors, José Calzada, Minister of Agriculture, Mexico, noted negative impacts of

unsustainable agricultural systems on ecosystems. Many countries described national efforts to promote environmental conservation and mainstream biodiversity in all sectors, emphasizing the need for synergies and full engagement of IPLCs and stakeholders, particularly women. BRAZIL urged investments in developing technology which will result in food productivity gains to reduce pressure on natural habitats. DENMARK underscored the need to: involve the private sector; and mobilize resources from all sources.

SWITZERLAND highlighted the need for: facilitated access to genetic resources; socioeconomic incentives for the empowerment of small-scale farmers in marginal areas; and water and soil management initiatives. FAO urged support to farmers, especially women, who are biodiversity custodians and knowledge holders. BANGLADESH said the country has been impacted by natural disasters, climate change and population pressures and called for biodiversity-related financing for vulnerable countries. COSTA RICA discussed the productivity of its environmental sector through tourism and ecosystem services and explained how it managed to triple its income per capita and double its forest cover.

ETHIOPIA stressed the role of subsistence agriculture, community-based gene banks and the role of women in mainstreaming biodiversity. NEW ZEALAND pointed to the impacts and costs of invasive alien species (IAS). GERMANY recognized that measures increasing effectiveness in agriculture can have negative effects such as high levels of nutrients and biodiversity loss on agricultural land and, with LUXEMBOURG, called for addressing harmful incentives and subsidies, as per Aichi Target 3 (elimination, phase out or reform of incentives, including subsidies, harmful to biodiversity).

NORWAY drew attention to the eighth Trondheim Conference on Biodiversity, noting its main conclusion calling for working together more closely with all relevant stakeholders to find solutions. SAMOA urged building institutional capacity and promoting synergies through coordination and cooperation at all levels. Noting that mainstreaming is a necessary condition for achieving the Aichi Targets, AUSTRIA expressed its support for the Cancún Declaration, while lamenting the deletion of the reference to organic agriculture. EL SALVADOR highlighted the need for systematic technology transfer.

MALI stressed the need for behavioral change to protect biodiversity. TANZANIA said that population growth can be overwhelming often leading to decline in other species. SOUTH AFRICA called for policy development to make development and biodiversity conservation mutually beneficial, including through holistic land management models. PERU suggested coordination between national and international conservation networks to support areas of high agrobiodiversity and to improve indigenous peoples' living conditions. SRI LANKA said it does not want to build an economy at the cost of its environment and children.

SLOVAKIA noted food systems are in crisis, urging for legal and market regulations, as well as science and research to promote food security and healthy ecosystems. MOZAMBIQUE highlighted the need for agricultural investments to develop sound and sustainable production systems. GUATEMALA stressed that biodiversity is one of the main pillars contributing to human welfare.

ROUNDTABLE ON TOURISM

Delegates at this roundtable, co-moderated by Minister de la Madrid, and Taleb Rifai, shared experiences in mainstreaming biodiversity in the tourism sector.

Calling for mainstreaming biodiversity and tourism into regional policies, EL SALVADOR stressed prioritizing biodiversity over tourists, and aligning tourism to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA underscored the need for more specialized tourism to promote biodiversity protection.

FRANCE pointed to nature-based tourism motivated by the observation and appreciation of nature, and called for operators to involve local communities and share the derived benefits. SOUTH AFRICA referred to her country's legislation which recognizes

the links between biodiversity and tourism, and acknowledges the importance of protected areas (PAs) and the critical role of IPLCs in sustainable tourism. CHINA highlighted the establishment of numerous national preservation and protected areas to promote green tourism. HONDURAS underscored efforts to achieve sustainable tourism, especially in PAs, and raise awareness of biodiversity conservation.

PANAMA drew attention to a decree on green tourism and scientific efforts to ensure that tourism does not negatively impact biodiversity. Calling for investment in biodiversity mainstreaming, EGYPT highlighted capacity-building activities to assist local communities to better care for their environments as well as combat illegal wildlife trade. JAMAICA drew attention to her country's Tourism Enhancement Fund as well as the development of national ecotourism guidelines.

NAMIBIA said that equitable management of PAs and the involvement of local communities are important drivers for tourism and economic growth. CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC stressed the need to: combat transboundary poaching; enhance tourism infrastructure; and build IPLCs' capacity.

GUATEMALA said the country is developing a multistakeholder sustainable tourism masterplan, and noted that the strategies and policies in place for tourism in PAs are partially funded through airline tariffs. The CZECH REPUBLIC discussed the positive impacts of mainstreaming biodiversity in tourism, noting a national focus on biodiversity education and awareness raising among tourists.

MALDIVES underlined that sustainable tourism provides an opportunity to reconcile economic development and environmental protection. SENEGAL explained a new public-private community partnership initiative to foster tourism and biodiversity, involving citizens and addressing human migration. JAPAN shared his country's focus on ecotourism to effectively preserve natural resources, drawing attention to the establishment of a national park project, which is expected to further biodiversity mainstreaming goals.

MOROCCO highlighted national environmental auditing processes to assess the status of touristic and historical sites. INDIA said that biodiversity conservation and responsible tourism are embedded into national policies, and include engagement with local communities. INDONESIA reiterated her country's support for the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, and discussed the country's concurrent efforts in biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation.

FIJI highlighted his country's leadership in ecotourism and protecting biodiversity through a green policy framework, and noted the need to prevent illegal trade in wildlife in species such as iguanas. TONGA suggested making mention of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Accelerated Modalities of Action (S.A.M.O.A.) Pathway in the Cancún Declaration.

IN THE CORRIDORS

The city of Cancún warmly welcomed the high-level delegates to the beginning of the "UN Biodiversity Conference." For the first time, the HLS is taking place before the negotiations, and many welcomed this arrangement and hoped that it would "set the pace and provide substantive guidance" for the heavy two weeks to come. From the outset, the intention of the HLS was clear: to stress the importance of mainstreaming biodiversity and assess the political will of decision makers to pragmatically address the challenging issues to be discussed over the course of the conference.

To this end, a draft of the Cancún Declaration was circulated and discussed informally, with some seasoned observers hoping that it will cement the commitment to mainstreaming biodiversity, and go a long way to bridge the gap between biodiversity conservation and economic growth. "The Declaration is as important as we make it," said one seasoned delegate, noting that even though it is not legally binding, it can still "concretize intentions to safeguard biodiversity."