

UN Biodiversity Conference Highlights: Thursday, 15 November 2018

On Thursday morning, the High-level Segment of the UN Biodiversity Conference held two parallel round table discussions, on mainstreaming biodiversity in the energy and mining, and in the health sectors. In the afternoon, plenary heard reports from the round tables; adopted the Sharm El-Sheikh Ministerial Declaration; held a panel discussion on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and 2050 vision; and launched the International Alliance on Nature and Culture. During lunchtime, high-level participants planted olive trees at the Peace Park, a botanical garden in Sharm El-Sheikh.

Round table on Mainstreaming Biodiversity in Energy and Mining

Co-Chair Tarek El-Molla, Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, Egypt, highlighted the role the mining and energy sectors play in the economy, as well as their direct and indirect impact on the environment and ecosystem services. He provided an overview of national measures to achieve economic development while protecting nature.

Co-Chair Carlos Manuel Rodriguez, Minister of Environment and Energy, Costa Rica, highlighted that the merging of the energy, mining, and environment ministries contributed to halting deforestation. He stated that now the country generates 100% of its electricity from renewable sources, while the economy has been tripled. He presented steps towards a new transportation and mobility paradigm, which aims to electrify the transportation sector.

Denis Sandy, Minister of Lands, Housing, and Environment, Sierra Leone, drew attention to the role of the mining and energy sectors in the country, and deforestation impacts. He highlighted national efforts to improve watershed management, transform the energy sector, and review mining legislation to ensure benefits for local communities.

Thembelani Thulas Nxesi, Minister of Public Works, South Africa, addressed innovation and investment in restoration of post-mining landscapes, noting that research shows that treatment of acid mine drainage can reclaim minerals, be a source of purified water, and provide employment opportunities.

Brian Sullivan, Executive Director, International Petroleum Industry Environmental Conservation Association, addressed its role to help the industry improve its environmental and social performance via liaising with the UN in a non-lobbying capacity and imposing peer pressure internally in the oil and gas sector.

Participants highlighted national strategies to tackle the impacts of mining on biodiversity, including: banning mining in forest reserves; criminal prosecution for mining code violations; strengthening regulations on small-scale mining; mandating land offsets for restoration after mining activities; and taxing mining

activity for a land trust fund. Others drew attention to measures to: produce biogas from invasive plants; phase out certain cooking fuels; and integrate the precautionary principle in planning.

Participants addressed: national efforts to minimize extraction impacts and ensure sound ecosystems; ways to improve transparency and accountability; and ways to develop new energy models that reduce both environmental impacts and dependency on imports. They further discussed: moving towards a circular economy; restoration and rehabilitation of mining sites; phasing-out the use of mercury in mining; smarter economic models that respect biophysical limits; and the need to address conflicts between wind energy developments and biodiversity objectives at the planning stage.

Participants elaborated on national actions, including: restoration of coral reefs; offshore wind farms developed to preserve marine biodiversity; transboundary cooperation to connect forest reserves; escrow accounts to cover closure of mines; and monitoring of mining activities of companies operating abroad.

Round table on Mainstreaming Biodiversity in Health

Co-Chair Hala Zayed, Minister of Health and Population, Egypt, emphasized the importance of studying the connections between health and biodiversity, including, *inter alia*, measuring the impact of air pollution. Co-Chair Karolina Skog, Minister of Environment, Sweden, outlined national efforts to develop inclusive, resilient, biodiverse, green cities, to build “the very foundation of our quality of life.”

Barbara Thomson, Deputy Minister of Environmental Affairs, South Africa, highlighted that the more money a country invests in biodiversity, the fewer the negative human health impacts. Joy St. John, Assistant Director-General for Climate and other Determinants of Health, World Health Organization (WHO), highlighted that only 5% of the world’s health sector resources are spent on prevention, and noted the publication of a comprehensive and authoritative WHO report on the connections between health and biodiversity.

In the ensuing discussion, participants highlighted national experiences on: strengthening biodiversity conservation for nutrition and well-being, and traditional use of medicinal plants; developing a national portfolio on air quality, water, and sanitation to reduce negative health impacts; combatting malaria, including through tools that require biosecurity measures; keeping genetically modified organisms out of the environment and, in some countries, out of the food chain; the importance of raising awareness of biodiversity within the health sector; integrating the human right to water into national constitutions; and enforcement with regard to violations that harm human life, wildlife, and the environment.

Participants called for: collaboration between WHO and UNEP to ensure that health and biodiversity linkages are taken into account in all regions; not using the natural environment as a means of pressure in conflict situations; addressing access to drinking water and sanitation along with air, water, and soil pollution; adequate financing platforms to address the biodiversity-health nexus; and building health-related targets into the post-2020 framework.

Delegates also stressed that: agricultural biodiversity underpins dietary diversity; exposure to noise and chemicals pose significant threats to both human health and biodiversity; development of green spaces has positive effects on physical and mental health; and biodiversity loss in certain regions also affects their culture.

Plenary

CBD Executive Secretary Cristiana Paşca Palmer presented a publication to mark the 25th anniversary of the Convention's entry into force.

Plenary heard reports from the round tables, including on: opportunities in making developments in economic sectors compatible with biodiversity objectives; the role of legislation, good governance, research, and technological advances, along with community and stakeholder involvement; the need to reflect steps for mainstreaming biodiversity into economic sectors in the post-2020 framework; and the need for national-level policy coherence.

Sharm El-Sheikh Declaration: Plenary then adopted the Sharm El-Sheikh Declaration on Investing in Biodiversity for People and Planet, developed by Egypt following consultation with parties.

In the Declaration, governments commit to working across all sectors to mainstream biodiversity through, among other actions: integrating biodiversity values in legislative and policy frameworks, and development and finance plans; phasing out or reforming subsidies and other harmful incentives; strengthening ecosystem-based approaches to climate change mitigation and adaptation; promoting sustainable consumption and production and a circular economy; and facilitating access to and transfer of relevant technologies. They further invite the UN General Assembly to convene a summit on biodiversity before CBD COP 15 in 2020, to highlight the urgency of action at the highest levels in support of a post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

Panel on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and vision to 2050: The panel was introduced and moderated by High-level Segment Chair Yasmine Fouad. Paşca Palmer presented on “the fierce urgency of now,” quoting Martin Luther King. She stressed that the international community must, *inter alia*, stay within the world's fast approaching ecological tipping points, and build a global coalition that engages and empowers all stakeholders.

Ahmed Kamali, Deputy Minister of Planning, Monitoring, and Administrative Reform, Egypt, spoke of engaging private sector and civil society to transform mindsets, helping people recognize biodiversity as part of food security, human health, community development, and other social and economic objectives. Claire Tutenuit, Executive Director, Entreprises pour l'Environnement, highlighted her organization, in which 40 companies in France have pledged ten common commitments to act for nature. Karmenu Vella, EU Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, called for setting and implementing clear and ambitious targets and priorities. Huang Runqiu, Vice-Minister of Ecology and Environment, China, stressed the importance of preserving the integrity of nature and reported on his country's efforts to restore species, protect biodiversity corridors, and achieve green development.

Manuel Pulgar Vidal, WWF International, focused on the mandate, vision, and elements for developing a clear post-2020 framework, noting that all elements should be measurable, progress should be tracked, and all steps should involve non-state

actors. Mirna Inés Fernandez, Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN), pointed out that youth are increasingly disconnected from nature. She called for integration of traditional knowledge and full implementation of indigenous prior informed consent. Martha Rojas Urrego, Secretary General, Ramsar Convention, speaking for the biodiversity-related conventions, expressed their commitment to contribute to the post-2020 framework in a manner that meets the goals of all conventions.

Chair Fouad, along with Paşca Palmer, and Huang Runqiu, Vice Minister of Ecology and Environment, China, introduced the “Egypt to China Action Agenda for Nature and People.”

Launch of the International Alliance on Nature and Culture: Paşca Palmer stressed that cultural and biological diversity, and the resulting biocultural diversity and resilience of human communities, is rapidly unraveling, and urged for its protection for present and future generations.

Ghaith Fariz, Director of the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Sciences in the Arab States, said that “culture and nature should not be separated,” and outlined the role of UNESCO in understanding, safeguarding, and celebrating the interplay between biodiversity and culture. Reminding delegates that the place where nature and culture meet is “our very identity,” Inger Andersen, IUCN Director General, emphasized three key aspects of nature and culture: stewardship; heritage; and respecting and protecting the rights of people to engage at practices at the interface of nature and culture.

Mohamed Salem, Director for Nature Conservation, Ministry of Environment, Egypt, highlighted the recognition of the connection between culture and nature since ancient times in Egypt; and called on the Alliance to enhance international efforts in this issue. Yeshing Juliana Upòn Yos, International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity, called for valuing the vast natural and cultural resources held by indigenous peoples, and their contributions, in the initiative.

Closing statements: Rwanda, for the AFRICAN GROUP, drew attention to challenges in the region. Samoa, for ASIA AND THE PACIFIC, said the post-2020 framework has to be bold to implement transformational change. Argentina, for GRULAC, committed to mainstreaming biodiversity across various sectors and to work towards the post-2020 framework. The EU called for the adoption of a long term strategic approach to mainstreaming. CANADA drew attention to investment in green infrastructure and natural disaster mitigation, and the establishment of a new protected area in the British Columbia dark woods region.

On behalf of the COP 15 Presidency, CHINA expressed commitment to work on a post-2020 framework in an open and collaborative way. Chair Fouad said a Chair's report will be prepared and presented to COP 14. She closed the High-level Segment at 6:54 pm.

In the Corridors

On the second and last day of the High-level Segment, several participants appreciated learning about effective national approaches emerging from the round tables on biodiversity mainstreaming. “We just need to grasp the opportunities,” one delegate stressed, pointing to the complementarities between the biodiversity and health agendas. “Biodiversity mainstreaming won't be easy, especially in the energy and mining sectors, but every effort matters, be it in regard to planning, enforcement, or restoration,” another delegate said. Many welcomed the invitation to the UN General Assembly to convene a biodiversity summit before 2020, as a way of building an engaging narrative, to attract both high-level and broad societal support for biodiversity. Others showed much enthusiasm about the launch of the new international alliance on nature and culture as one step towards changing the narrative and, “finally,” helping the world recognize biodiversity as “the living fabric of our planet.”