

## UN Biodiversity Conference Highlights: Wednesday, 14 November 2018

On Wednesday morning, the High-level Segment of the UN Biodiversity Conference heard opening statements and engaged in a panel discussion on “Investing in Biodiversity for People and Planet.” In the afternoon, participants heard from the Prime Minister of Egypt Mostafa Madbouly. They then held two parallel round table discussions, on mainstreaming biodiversity in the infrastructure sector, and on mainstreaming biodiversity in the manufacturing and processing sectors.

### Opening Plenary

Yasmine Fouad, Minister of Environment, Egypt, highlighted the importance of participation of all sectors in mainstreaming biodiversity, drawing attention to the attendance of Egypt’s planning and finance Ministers. She noted Africa’s Ministerial Declaration, adopted during Tuesday’s Africa Summit, aiming to integrate biodiversity into development decisions. Khaled Fouda Saddiq Mohammed, Governor of South Sinai, Egypt, welcomed participants and highlighted that ancient Egyptians incorporated nature into scripture and temples.

Amb. José Octavio Tripp Villanueva, Mexico, on behalf of COP 13 Presidency, stated that actions must be accelerated to meet 2020 targets and the SDGs. He urged all ministries, particularly of mining and infrastructure, to collaborate on mainstreaming biodiversity into different economic sectors.

Erik Solheim, Executive Director of UN Environment Programme (UNEP), outlined recent progress around the world, as well as an unprecedented urgency to work towards a new deal for nature beyond 2020, which includes bringing biodiversity to the core of business decisions and kitchen table conversations around the world. He emphasized three key points to achieving the task at hand, namely conservation, co-existence, and communication.

Cristiana Paşca Palmer, CBD Executive Secretary, highlighted the stark reality that we are failing to arrest the loss of biodiversity, and underscored that the preservation and restoration of biodiversity is bound to the preservation and restoration of human kind. She emphasized that the crisis will not be solved by the international biodiversity community working in isolation, noting the need to shift societal narratives away from production and extraction, and towards co-existence, co-creating, and co-sharing.

Siim Kiisler, Minister of Environment, Estonia, President of the UN Environment Assembly, emphasized the need to create synergies on: efficient use of resources; maintenance and restoration of ecosystems; and climate change adaptation and mitigation. He noted the momentum and commitment towards a pollution-free planet; and stressed the need to share and implement innovative solutions and promote sustainable production and consumption. Highlighting how behavioral change creates demand and opportunities for the business sector, he called for better quality environmental data and for improving data monitoring systems.

**Panel Discussion: The importance of investing in biodiversity for people and planet:** Moderator Carlos Manuel Rodriguez, Minister of Environment and Energy, Costa Rica, opened the panel discussion by reflecting on the “invisible crisis” of biodiversity loss induced by humans, noting the need for significant and additional action, and an ambitious post-2020 biodiversity framework.

Jonathan Baillie, Executive Vice-President and Chief Scientist, National Geographic Society, highlighted the intrinsic and utilitarian value of all species, underscoring the services they provide to humans. Baillie called for: redefining economic growth, focusing on natural capital; scaling up payments for ecosystem services; impact investing, which offers social returns in addition to financial ones; and developing a stronger narrative for biodiversity that will lead to unprecedented resource mobilization.

Mohamed Maait, Minister of Finance, Egypt, focused on mobilization of domestic resources to finance biodiversity-related targets. He highlighted efforts to achieve Egypt’s Vision 2030, including: legislative initiatives; tax reforms to promote electric cars and solar energy; and plans to issue green bonds.

Emmanuelle Wargon, State Minister of Ecological and Inclusive Transition, France, presented on Aichi Target 3 (perverse incentives). She highlighted the principle of “zero net loss” of biodiversity, enshrined in the new national legislation. She emphasized: conditional agricultural financial support to ensure that practices respect the environment and biodiversity; the role of the private sector; and policy integration.

Drawing attention to interlinkages among the goals of the Rio Conventions, Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), highlighted nature-based solutions as climate change mitigation and adaptation tools, and the contributions of reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) to biodiversity conservation.

Naoki Ishi, Chairperson and CEO of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), stressed the need to transform the entire economic system, which requires involving the whole of government, including ministries of planning and finance, as well as multiple stakeholders. She called for the international community to think seriously about system transformation, and to develop a new social contract to protect the global commons.

René Castro Salazar, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), highlighted that the global rate of deforestation is slowing, and at least 21 countries are now demonstrating that deforestation is not necessary to increase food production and improve nutrition. He noted the trend of the narrowing human diet based on a handful of crops, which contributes to malnutrition, obesity, and biodiversity loss.

Adriana Dinu, UN Development Programme (UNDP), said we must address global poverty and inequality before considering how to effectively upscale investment in nature-based enterprises.

She noted that the potential to scale up nature-based investment can be seen in: rise in microfinance; “massive revolution” in how private companies are investing in their supply chains; and the launch of the UNDP Lion’s Share Initiative, where private companies contribute 0.5% of the budget of any advertising featuring animals to a trust fund to protect biodiversity.

Emad El Din Adly, Arab Network for Environment and Development, highlighted how NGOs in the region have fostered dialogue and partnerships among different stakeholders. Emphasizing synergies between the Rio Conventions, Yasmine Fouad called for collaboration, not competition, and for “going back to basics,” building on mutual successes and mainstreaming.

Prime Minister of Egypt Mostafa Madbouly called for a paradigm shift, where all sectors and stakeholders work together, and where development includes economic, social, and environmental aspects, and equal opportunities for all, while preserving the rights of future generations.

### **Round table on Mainstreaming Biodiversity in Infrastructure**

Co-Chair Randa Elmenshawy, Vice-Minister of Housing, Utilities, and Urban Development, Egypt, emphasized that failure to mainstream biodiversity into the infrastructure sector will have worldwide repercussions. Co-Chair Thulasizwe Thembelani Nxesi, Minister of Public Works, South Africa, highlighted adoption of a national green building policy that promotes, *inter alia*, relevant indigenous knowledge systems.

Huang Runqiu, Vice-Minister of Ecology and Environment, China, outlined national progress in, *inter alia*, developing animal migration bridges over major roads. Emmanuelle Wargon, State Minister of Ecological and Inclusive Transition, France, outlined her country’s efforts to offset infrastructure projects to ensure no net loss of biodiversity at the national level. Highlighting Egypt’s exemplary upstream planning conducted by a consortium of ministries in the wind and energy sector, Mary Porter Pechka, International Finance Corporation, World Bank, stressed that biodiversity issues need to be screened at an earlier stage, on a broader scale, and through collaborative partnerships. Yun Liang, China Harbour Engineering Company, gave examples of how his company considers biodiversity impacts, such as those on river dolphins, throughout the entire planning and development process.

In the ensuing discussion, participants highlighted national experiences on, among others: the creation of joint commissions to analyze infrastructure impacts on biodiversity; integration of biodiversity into national sustainable development programmes and fiscal plans; addressing increased urbanization; and implementing sustainable urban mobility plans. Others drew attention to the development of ecosystem-based, climate-proof infrastructure resilient to climate-induced hazards; urban forest projects; and investment in urban green infrastructure.

Participants drew attention to: monitoring and reconstructing habitats to mitigate the effects of infrastructure projects; implementing the precautionary principle; raising awareness within the infrastructure sector; and the challenges of implementing and enforcing environmental impact assessments. Many pointed to the need for building government capacity for biodiversity mainstreaming, regional integration, and moving from policy building to implementation.

Participants further highlighted: the need for a more holistic approach to land management; green infrastructure as a crucial, and cheaper, approach to protecting landscapes against natural hazards; and banning all infrastructure in protected areas.

### **Round table on Mainstreaming Biodiversity in Manufacturing and Processing**

Opening the round table discussion, Co-Chair Amr Nassar, Minister of Industry and Trade, Egypt, provided an overview of the industrial sector in Egypt, highlighting efforts to protect the

environment, including: the national 2030 Strategy for Sustainable Development; a strategy for controlling energy consumption by 2025; and strategies for green industry and entrepreneurship. Co-Chair Eugenie Sage, Minister of Conservation, New Zealand, stressed that the current biodiversity crisis cannot be solved by government agencies alone, but requires cooperation with industry, indigenous peoples, and civil society. She pointed to New Zealand’s new way of looking at economic growth in terms of its ability to sustain natural resources, meet fiscal objectives, and protect the environment.

Derek Hanekom, Minister of Tourism and Acting Minister of Environmental Affairs, South Africa, underscored that the manufacturing sector accounts for 15% of the global gross domestic product and 20% of jobs worldwide, but also consumes 35% of all energy and emits 20% of total CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Jochen Flasbarth, State Secretary, Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, and Nuclear Safety, Germany, focused on the economic dimension of biodiversity, addressing The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) initiative, and underscored the need to include biodiversity aspects in existing supply-chain instruments. Edson Gonçalves Duarte, Minister of Environment, Brazil, stressed his country’s efforts on protected areas, noting they have increased by 190% in the past two years. He highlighted: the need for innovative economic instruments; benefit-sharing provisions; and institutionalization of systems that allow the efficient use of genetic resources, including digital sequence information.

C. K. Mishra, Secretary of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, India, focused on the value of biodiversity and ecosystem services and the benefits to local communities; and India’s commitment to build a green economy with increased manufacturing. Minoru Kiuchi, State Minister of Environment, Japan, highlighted long-standing national experience in mainstreaming biodiversity, and also guidelines that have been developed for the private sector to reflect the SDGs. Peter White, World Business Council on Sustainable Development, proposed that discussions focus on: fully engaging people; systems instead of sectors; transformation of economic systems; and integration of nature into all sectors.

In the ensuing discussion, governments were invited to join a recently launched High Ambition Alliance on Chemicals and Waste. Participants addressed, *inter alia*: the need for strong legislative and regulatory bodies; implementation of the polluter pays principle; the circular economy approach, and the climate change and biodiversity nexus; incentives; support for effective implementation of national biodiversity strategies and action plans; the role of information technologies in providing information on manufacturing processes, air and water quality, and enabling consumers to make informed choices; challenges due to land-use policies; issues around plastics and microplastics; efforts to develop a genebank for floral genetic diversity; and the role of the 2030 Agenda as a way to mainstream biodiversity.

### **In the Corridors**

The High-level Segment of the UN Biodiversity Conference opened with stark reminders of our inability to arrest environmental degradation and biodiversity loss. A revitalized passion, however, evident in many of the presentations, created a sense of optimism. “Some wonderful new ideas are being initiated,” a participant offered, pointing to, among others, the recently launched Lion’s Share Initiative, which aims to raise funds for animal conservation from companies featuring animals in advertisements. Another participant remarked on the emergence of new narratives referring to the need for behavioral change and transformation of the entire economic system. “Maybe the time has come to talk seriously about the root causes of biodiversity loss,” she noted.