



CBD

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Biodiversity and Climate Change

STATEMENT

by

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BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

at the

**OPENING OF THE REGIONAL WORKSHOP FOR SOUTH,
SOUTH-EAST AND EAST ASIA**

on

**CAPACITY-BUILDING FOR NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY
STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLANS AND
MAINSTREAMING OF BIODIVERSITY**

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, a study prepared by more than 1,395 experts from 95 countries, demonstrates that the pressures on the planet's natural functions caused by human activity have reached such a high level that the ability of ecosystems to satisfy the needs of future generations is seriously, and perhaps irretrievably, compromised. In the last half of the twentieth century, humans changed ecosystems more rapidly and extensively than in any comparable period of history, leading to an unprecedented extinction of biological diversity. During the last century, the rate of species extinction increased to up to a thousand times the background rate.

This unprecedented loss of biodiversity was confirmed by the the fourth edition of the Global Environment Outlook launched in October last year by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The authoritative assessment of the state of the environment of our planet reiterates that we, human beings, are witnessing, and are responsible for, a reduction in the distribution and functioning of land, freshwater and marine biodiversity more rapid than at any time in human history. This unprecedented loss of biodiversity is being compounded by climate change. The Fourth IPCC Assessment Report indicates that up to 30 per cent of all known species are likely to be at increased risk of extinction before the end of this century. The report predicts that here in Asia, one of the megadiverse regions of our planet, up to 50% of biodiversity is at risk due to climate change, while as much as 88% of coral reefs may be lost over the next 30 years.

Addressing these unprecedented challenges calls for an enhanced implementation of the three objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The national biodiversity strategies and action plans are the key to the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity at the national level.

The famous Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen, once said, "A thousand words will not leave so deep an impression as one deed." National biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs) are the pillars that uphold the Convention on Biological Diversity. Indeed, Article 6 of the Convention, which refers to the development of such plans and to the mainstreaming of biodiversity considerations in sectoral policies, is the cornerstone of national implementation of the three objectives of the Convention. Meeting the biodiversity challenges facing mankind therefore requires effective and rigorously implemented NBSAPs.

Owing to its unique natural heritage and the relation of special bond of its people to nature, the Asian region has so much to contribute, and this why we are assembled here today in this beautiful country and city of Singapore.

On behalf of the Secretariat for the Convention on Biological Diversity, I would like to thank the Government of Singapore, and the Singapore National Parks Board in particular, for hosting this regional workshop aimed at building the capacity and transforming words into deeds. I would like to thank the Mr. Ng Lang, the Chief Executive Officer for his welcoming remarks and for his outstanding achievement to protecting the rich natural heritage of this great country. I also wish to thank the Center for Biodiversity of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Governments of Norway, Canada and Japan for their kind, generous support to facilitate the participation of developing countries in this workshop.

The coming days mark the very first of a series of capacity-building workshops aimed at sharing experience and organized by the Secretariat in all regions of the world to support the improvement and implementation of NBSAPs. As Asia has so much to contribute, it is fitting that the first workshop is being held here in this region and here in Singapore, a world leader on environmental matters. The way the natural history of this city-state has changed over the last 200 years mirrors the changes that have taken place in Asia and gives an insight to what will

happen to the region in the decade ahead. “Singa Pura”—the Lion City—a country which has included nature as a national symbol and transformed the concept of “the garden in the city” into tangible reality, has so much to share and to give to the rest of the region and to the world. This applies to all of you present today.

I am indeed very pleased to note that nearly all countries present here have completed and adopted their national biodiversity strategies and action plans. I am very happy to point out that Timor-Leste, the newest Party to the Convention, has initiated a process to develop its national biodiversity strategy and action plan. And, following my visit there last week, I am pleased to announce that Brunei Darussalam will soon become 191st Party to the Convention and begin its process of developing a national strategy. It is wonderful to see both countries present at this workshop.

I am particularly pleased to note that six countries in the region, including Bhutan, Japan, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, as well as Singapore, have updated their NBSAPs—a significantly higher proportion than in other regions. . Japan has, in fact, linked its national actions with the 2010 biodiversity target and has recently finalized its third NBSAP. In addition, two others countries have indicated that revisions are in progress.

I would also like to pay tribute to the widely participatory process followed by India in developing its revised NBSAP. In what must amount to the largest public biodiversity consultation ever, India has developed a number of state, local and ecoregional plans and is due to finalize its national plan shortly. China is also developing a national biodiversity strategy and updating an action plan to address new challenges arising from its rapid economic growth.

I commend each country on their tremendous efforts, without which the Convention would have little impact.

NBSAPs must be tools that ensure that biodiversity is integrated into decision making across all departments of government and all sectors of society and the economy, as called for in Article 6(b) of the Convention. The Conference of the Parties has noted that progress in implementing NBSAPs and mainstreaming biodiversity has not been sufficient to achieve the goals that Parties set for themselves in the Strategic Plan of the Convention. An in-depth review highlighted the need for this series of workshops to contribute to the mainstreaming of biodiversity and the overall strengthening of countries’ capacities. Hence, we are all here today. I trust that this workshop will provide valuable support to each country and advance the mainstreaming of biodiversity.

Regional and subregional cooperation is crucial to address biodiversity issues, in particular the common threats and issues we all face. Naturally, to achieve long-lasting change, one must begin with local actions, then move to the national and regional levels. Initiatives at each level must be mutually reinforcing and thus require dialogue and cooperation. Only through synergistic action and social solidarity will we reduce and ultimately reverse biodiversity loss.

As such it is heartening to note that various mechanisms are being developed and various activities undertaken in this region for cooperation in biodiversity. As countries have begun to recognize the importance of their natural assets to their development, ASEAN has increasingly become an effective subregional mechanism for cooperation in biodiversity. Additionally, the biodiversity programme in north-east Asia, coordinated by United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), has ensured the inclusion of a number of countries in that subregion over the years. Even in broader cooperation frameworks such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), biodiversity is also identified as one important area of cooperation as shown indicated by the adoption of a Declaration on Climate Change, Energy and the Environment in the APEC Summit in October 2007 in Australia. And of course, most

recently, the 13th ASEAN Summit here in Singapore adopted a Declaration on the Environmental Sustainability in which all the Heads of State or Government have reaffirmed their commitment to achieving the 2010 target and identified some important initiatives and actions for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use.

The ASEAN Working Group on Environmentally Sustainable Cities (AWGESC) is a unique mechanism for promoting eco-friendly cities. The year 2007 marked a paradigm shift and be remembered as a major milestone. For the first time in history, the world's urban population will exceed its rural population. The majority of the world's population is now living in urban areas, mainly in poor countries; poor in terms of money, but very rich in terms of biodiversity. A new era is born, the era of "*Homo Urbanus*", the city dweller. The impact is expected to have far-reaching implications on humanity. I applaud the initiative to convene in June this year a World Cities Summit that will focus on environmental issues in urban settings, announced by Mr. Lee Hsien Loong, the Prime Minister of Singapore, in his address last month in Bali at the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. This summit will enhance the "biodiversity and cities" initiative which will be submitted to high-level segment of the 9th meeting of the Conference of the parties to be held in Bonn in May this year.

The Secretariat of the Convention has stepped up its efforts to reach out to regional entities for promoting regional cooperation in biodiversity, including South-South cooperation. We have concluded a Memorandum of Understanding with ESCAP that aims to integrate biodiversity into relevant regional and subregional programmes and plans and deliver practical assistance to countries in the region to support their efforts to implement the Convention and achieve the three objectives of the Convention. In a few minutes, I will be signing a Memorandum of Cooperation with the ASEAN Center for Biodiversity to strengthen our cooperation to provide further support to the ASEAN countries. We all look forward to seeing the fruits of our labour.

I encourage you all to participate actively in and contribute to all the discussions in the workshop, which, I am sure, will be a model to be followed and emulated by the workshops to be organized soon in other part of the world.

Thank you for your kind attention.