



STATEMENT BY

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CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

at the opening of the

ASEAN CONFERENCE ON BIODIVERSITY

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**Convention on
Biological Diversity**

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Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is truly an honour to be with you today at the Second ASEAN Conference on Biodiversity, in the great city of Bangkok.

On behalf of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, I wish to thank and congratulate:

Minister Karnjanara, the Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, and the Government of Thailand

Deputy Secretary General, Arthakaivalvatee, and the ASEAN Secretariat, and

Executive Director Roberto Oliva and the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity.

The theme of this conference, “biodiversity for sustainable development”, could not come at a better time. Finally, the world is waking up to the essential role of biodiversity and healthy ecosystems for all life on earth, *including* humans and our well-being. The opportunity for us to make lasting change has arrived.

In the past year, there have been many major developments that have recognized the crucial role that biodiversity plays for development, for livelihoods, for human well-being. The year 2015 saw the adoption by Heads of State, in the United Nations General Assembly, of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. Biodiversity and healthy ecosystems feature prominently in this outcome.

Also in 2015, the third United Nations Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, in Japan, agreed on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, in which the role of healthy ecosystems in protecting against disasters was firmly recognized.

And, of course, in December, countries reached a landmark agreement at the twenty-first session of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Paris, in which biodiversity and ecosystems plays a key role.

Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity have understood well the connection between biodiversity and sustainable development, which is strongly reflected in the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

At its twelfth meeting, in Pyeongchang, Republic of Korea, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention adopted a decision that strengthened the call for integrating biodiversity into poverty eradication and development plans, along with very specific priorities known as the Chennai guidance – named after the city in India where the final expert workshop was held.

Current situation

This recognition of the essential role of biodiversity comes at a critical moment. The fourth edition of the *Global Biodiversity Outlook* released in 2014 — the flagship assessment of the Convention on Biological Diversity — tells us that, although we are on track to achieve a few of the global commitments contained in the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, in most cases, we are not, or we are even heading in the opposite direction.

Unfortunately, short-term gains still drive actions around the world, even though they will cost us more in the longer run. South-East Asia is, of course, no exception.

Economic growth in the South-East Asian region has brought much prosperity for some, but, in some cases, at a high cost to ecosystems and biodiversity. Changes in land cover from agriculture, fisheries and forestry are driving extinction rates in the region — which are among the highest in the world. Destruction of peatlands has caused damage to fragile ecosystems and contributed to carbon emissions. Loss of forest cover has made many parts of the region more susceptible to flooding and other natural disasters, which can have significant repercussions for economic prosperity and human well-being.

Many important, positive actions have been taken by countries in the region. Indonesia further extended its logging ban. Malaysia recently underscored its commitment to retain 50 per cent of its forest areas. And closer to here, a rare Pied Hornbill may soon fly again in the jungles of northern Thailand.

However, clearly, much more still needs to be done.

Mainstreaming

The challenge before us is how to translate what we know about the benefits of biodiversity and ecosystems to those who make decisions that can adversely impact these resources. And the challenge for those who have the power to make such decisions is to have courage in the face of economic, social and political realities.

Even in 1992, the negotiators of the Convention on Biological Diversity recognized that the goals of the Convention could not be realized through conservation alone. The Convention calls for Parties to “integrate...the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity into relevant sectoral or cross-sectoral plans, programmes and policies”, and to “integrate consideration of the conservation and sustainable use of biological resources into national decision-making”.

These objectives have come to be known as “mainstreaming” biodiversity. Simply stated, the idea is that, if biodiversity is properly considered in terms of the benefits it provides, it will change the outcomes of decisions in a way that is beneficial to our natural world and resources, as well as development and human well-being.

In practice, this concept means several things. First, there is a need to address effectively the approaches used by those sectors which both depend, and have a large impact on, biodiversity, such as forestry, agriculture, fisheries and tourism.

Second, it will also require the use of policies that cut across sectors, such as those related to financing, infrastructure investment and development, and budget processes.

Third, it will require putting in place effective governance arrangements by, for example, ensuring that government agencies responsible for the protection of biodiversity and ecosystems have a voice in the decisions that impact upon those resources.

The Conference

This Second ASEAN Conference on Biodiversity is addressing some of the most important linkages between biodiversity and these other arenas.

First is the issue of progress made towards achieving Aichi Biodiversity Targets. This year will mark the half-way point in the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity. It will also be the first time that the Convention’s new Subsidiary Body on Implementation meets to examine progress made.

There has been good progress in the ASEAN region with regard to the development of national biodiversity strategies and action plans as well as excellent reporting on the mid-term assessment towards achievement of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

Secondly, this conference is highlighting the importance of access and benefit sharing. As many of you probably know, the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing entered into force in 2014. The impact of the Protocol in creating greater transparency and legal certainty for providers and users of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge will increase as more countries join the Protocol and undertake to implement its obligations. The total number of ratifications now stands at 70, and we hope to reach at least 100 ratifications this year, in time for the second meeting of Parties, which will be held in December alongside COP 13. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage all remaining countries in the region to expedite their ratification so that the Nagoya Protocol can be fully implemented within the ASEAN region.

Another key connection that this conference addresses is that of human health, biodiversity conservation and development. In 2015, the World Health Organization and the CBD Secretariat jointly led the development of the first ever state of knowledge review entitled *Connecting Global Priorities: Biodiversity and Human Health*. This study made clear the need for collaboration at the biodiversity and human health nexus and the need to implement integrated biodiversity and health strategies. I would like to call upon all of you today to ensure that this issue is made a priority in the ASEAN region.

While there are successes, there is also significant work to be done on ecosystems. For example, while globally we seem to be on track to achieve the geographical coverage of Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 on protected areas, such areas must be more than a mark on a map, but provide meaningful actions and enforcement to protect the biodiversity within their borders. I would like to congratulate the region for the work done to date on the ASEAN Heritage Parks Program and, in particular, with regard to the 38 regionally important designated sites that promote best practices.

The linkages between climate change and biodiversity also need greater attention. The global commitment to tackle climate change has never been stronger, but such efforts need to strengthen, and not weaken, healthy ecosystems. The commitment announced by the Government of Malaysia at the Climate COP in Paris to retain 50% of its forest areas was very important in this regard.

A key aspect of mainstreaming is the need to engage the private sector. The good news is, more and more companies are recognizing that their supply chains, reputation and profits are tied to healthy ecosystems and sustainable sourcing.

The CBD Secretariat has been actively working to increase the engagement of the private sector, through a number of initiatives, including the Global Partnership for Business and Biodiversity, which encourages cooperation and dialogue within and across sectors in order to help businesses better understand and mainstream biodiversity. We are very pleased that the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity is a regional member of the Partnership, and I would call upon all countries in the region to become involved in this Partnership.

The way forward - opportunities

I would like to conclude by looking at opportunities for our way forward.

I know first-hand that achieving the kind of change that we need is easier said than done. But, it is possible. We have much stronger evidence to help us, with not just science, but economics and data on health and welfare, on our side.

However, to make change takes more than just facts, and I know the kind of hard work and persistence that is required to make change come about, whether in the private sector, government, the

United Nations or elsewhere. A key element is to have the right political opportunity. And I believe we have this now.

Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals represents one such opportunity. Biodiversity is embedded throughout the SDGs.

For example, the Declaration states, in paragraph 33, that “we recognise that social and economic development depends on the sustainable management of our planet’s natural resources.”

Importantly, biodiversity is mentioned throughout the SDGS, not only in Goals 14 and 15. For instance, it is included in:

Goal 1 – poverty. It is not explicit, but target 15.9 states: “by 2020, integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts”. Thus, it is important to take the SDGs as a whole.

Goal 2 – food security. Target 2.4 states: “by 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems”.

Target 2.5 includes a target on access and benefit sharing.

Goal 6 – water. Target 6.6 states: “by 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes”.

Goal 11 – urban areas. Target 11.a, “Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning.”

Goal 12 – sustainable consumption and production. Target 12.2 states: “by 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources”.

And of course, in Goal 14, ocean and coastal ecosystems, and Goal 15, terrestrial ecosystems.

The SDGS are a good accomplishment, but now we need to act to ensure that biodiversity remains central to implementation.

At the national level, we need to ensure that biodiversity is linked to development, and other aspects of the SDGs. Efforts to address biodiversity must not fall into a silo, where biodiversity is only thought to matter in Goals 14 and 15, separate from development and other goals, as this would defeat the entire meaning of what was accomplished in New York.

Another major opportunity is the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, which will be held in Mexico this December and will focus on mainstreaming of biodiversity in key sectors against the backdrop of Agenda 2030. In addition to COP itself, there will be a high-level segment, and we will also welcome voluntary pledges as well as looking to scale up those made at COP 21.

Finally, we are very grateful for our partnership with the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity. The ACB has been a leader in the region, and very active with us in a number of fields, and we are pleased to be extending our formal relationship with the ACB through 2020 here this week.

I wish you a successful conference.

Thank you.
