

**Opening speech by the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity,
Astrid Schomaker, for the sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the
Convention on Biological Diversity**

21 October 2024

Your Excellency Huang Runqiu, Minister of Ecology and Environment of China,

Your Excellency Susana Muhamad, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development of Colombia and President of the sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties,

Ms. Dilian Francisca Toro, Governor of the Valle del Cauca,

Mr. Alejandro Eder, Mayor of Cali,

Excellencies, distinguished delegates and guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the United Nations Biodiversity Conference 2024 in Cali, the gem of the Valle del Cauca.

Welcome to Colombia, “el país de la belleza”, one of the most biodiversity-rich countries on our planet.

I would like to acknowledge the donors that have supported the participation of 204 delegates from 130 developing country Parties through the Special Voluntary Trust Fund for Facilitating the Participation of Parties.

Thank you, Austria, Belgium, Canada, European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, Kingdom of the Netherlands, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The Secretariat is also grateful to the donors that have supported the participation of 45 representatives of indigenous peoples and local communities through the Special Voluntary Trust Fund for Facilitating the Participation of Indigenous and Local Communities.

Thank you, Australia, Finland, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom.

Two years ago, at its fifteenth meeting, the Conference of the Parties delivered the historic Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. A game changer for nature and for humanity.

Over the coming two weeks, here, in Cali, we must build on what the Conference of the Parties achieved in Montreal, finish its unfinished business and demonstrate how we are turning commitments into action.

I wish to express my gratitude to His Excellency Huang Runqiu, President of the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties and Minister of Ecology and Environment, for his leadership and personal commitment and for the consistent support of China for the Secretariat during his long tenure as President.

I am confident that the Convention can count on the support of Colombia and Her Excellency Susana Muhamad, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development and President of the sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, in the biennium ahead.

This is our largest meeting of the Conference of the Parties to date.

We believe that this increased interest across the board, from the finance sector and business to the media, is indicative of an increased understanding that the biodiversity crisis has become an emergency and can no longer be sent to the waiting room.

Halting and reversing biodiversity loss and the stabilization of the climate system go hand in hand.

So, with the eyes of the world on us, let us make the most of this opportunity.

Thanks to the extraordinary diplomatic outreach that Colombia has deployed, the high-level segment of the sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties will secure unprecedented political capital to help us to do just that. Let us go the extra mile to get negotiations across the finishing line.

In the coming days, there will also be unprecedented public participation.

Cali is home to the largest green zone in the history of the Convention, with over 1,000 events involving tens of thousands of participants.

Within the blue zone, a whole-of-government and whole-of-society conversation about stepping up action for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use is about to start. We do need all hands on deck.

The scale and pace of biodiversity loss are exacerbated by climate change, land degradation and desertification, and pollution and waste in their multiple forms.

This triple planetary crisis, and I quote the recent global foresight report by the United Nations Environment Programme, is feeding into human crises, such as conflict for territory and resources, displacement and deteriorating health.

This means that what we do at this meeting matters, that what we do at home matters, and matters no less than for the future of mankind.

Of course, in the Convention on Biological Diversity, we are not alone in trying to stop mankind's war on nature.

A few weeks after the present meeting ends here in Cali, the world will have the chance to conclude negotiations on a global plastics treaty.

Later this year, two more meetings of Conferences of Parties, in Baku and Riyadh, respectively, will offer opportunities to leverage the "Rio trio" and mount a more adequate response to nature's distress call.

Synergies must be sought at all levels, but perhaps most urgently at the level of national implementation.

We can no longer afford to work in silos.

So let it be the message from Cali to Baku and Riyadh that we are ready to work in new ways; that we are ready to bring our planning, monitoring and reporting processes together for more impactful action.

This meeting must also be seen through that lens.

The two meetings of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meetings of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing, respectively, combine with the sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to offer a packed agenda.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Among the many important steps that must be taken at this meeting, four issues stand out:

- The alignment of national planning with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and the yardsticks that will be used to measure progress against the 23 targets.
- The recognition of the role of indigenous peoples and local communities in the institutional functioning of the Convention on Biological Diversity.
- Resource mobilization and the pressing need for progress on means of implementation.
- The operationalization of the multilateral mechanism on digital sequence information on genetic resources, including a global fund.

Last week, the open-ended forum for voluntary country review, which the Subsidiary Body on Implementation piloted at its fifth meeting, provided insights on the challenges that Parties were

encountering in the critical first step of aligning their national strategies and action plans and national targets with the Framework.

We are making progress, albeit not yet at the pace needed.

We need to see more updated national strategies and action plans commensurate with the ambition of the Framework. Let us use this meeting to identify and overcome what is holding us back.

A time-sensitive immediate step is the finalization of the mechanisms for planning, monitoring, reporting and review of the implementation of the Framework.

Another crucial step will be to adopt the proposed programme of work on Article 8(j) and other provisions of the Convention with adequate institutional arrangements that elevate the role of indigenous peoples and local communities. The world needs their knowledge and contributions to the protection of nature and its sustainable use.

Let us make this historic step here at the “COP of the people”, or “COP de la gente”.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates and guests, ladies and gentlemen,

The sixteenth meeting will be a moment of truth for biodiversity finance, the lifeblood of implementation. The adoption of the resource mobilization strategy and the financial mechanism will bring propulsion to implementation.

In the coming days, the Conference of the Parties can break new ground by finishing what you started in Montreal two years ago: operationalizing the multilateral mechanism for the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the use of digital sequence information on genetic resources, including the associated global fund.

This would support the implementation of the Framework and boost biodiversity finance.

We know what success looks like. Let us set ourselves up for success. Let us find the courage to enhance our modus operandi to deliver better.

We must step up action for nature. Science tells us that we are lurching towards dangerous tipping points. Global action must shift to emergency mode.

In the next two weeks, you will have before you numerous documents in various versions and with innumerable brackets.

Let us make it our collective aim to move beyond brackets. Let us come together, listen and be ready to reconsider and compromise.

Because, surely, peace with nature cannot be put in brackets.

Muchas gracias.
