



Video Statement for the International Day of Biodiversity 2019

Dr. Cristiana Paşca Palmer, Executive Secretary, UN Convention on Biological Diversity

Greetings on this year's International Day of Biodiversity, which highlights the global importance of biodiversity for all people and for the planet. Today also underscores the work that we all must do— every day of the year—to conserve, restore, and equitably share nature and the myriad benefits that it provides humans who share this one small planet as our home.

“Biodiversity” may sound like a fancy word, but the concept is quite simple even as it is incredibly profound: it means all nature — all forms of life on earth, from individual species through entire ecosystems.

Biodiversity is the natural infrastructure supporting all life on earth — including human life. It is the food we eat - it is really on our plates every day - Biodiversity is the water we drink, and it is also the air we breathe. More than that, biodiversity is part of us, as we humans are part of nature. Therefore, it is not an accident that we chose this year's theme for the International Biodiversity Day to be: “Our food, our health, and our biodiversity”. This focuses our attention on the intimate connections between health, food, and our natural environments. The truth is that without healthy nature and biodiversity, we cannot have quality nutrition, and without quality nutrition we cannot have good health – as simple as that.

Despite its central importance for human health and well-being, our current global food system is increasingly broken. And this adds to a genuine health crisis: one-half of the world is malnourished. At present, 2 billion people – including over 160 million children – already suffer from undernutrition, and an equivalent number are either overweight or obese. Meanwhile, regrettably, approximately one third of all food produced is lost or wasted.

It is now well established that the way we grow, process, transport, consume, and waste food are leading causes of land degradation, which in turn is among the most prominent threats to the biodiversity we need and cherish.

The variety of species and genetic resources used for food and agriculture has considerably declined over the past century. And if you know, today, 75% of the world's energy intake is produced by only 12 plants and 5 animal species.

As biodiversity continues to decline, so too does the agroecosystems and the knowledge systems that nurture traditional foods, most of them nutritionally highly superior to the energy-rich and nutrient-poor food products that have become staples of simplified diets.

These challenges are really daunting, but solutions also exist and we know that with broad actions we can overcome all these threats. The links between biodiversity, ecosystems, and the provision of benefits to human health are deeply entrenched in our global commitments to curb biodiversity loss and climate change and also serve as crucial entry points for achieving of the Sustainable Development Goals. They will also be central considerations as we move forward in developing the new Global Biodiversity Framework, which hopefully will be adopted at the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in 2020 in Kunming.

Cross-sectoral action, steadfast commitment across all scales of governance and throughout the whole-of-the-food chain is much needed. This includes conserving land and water resources used for food production; reducing the contamination of drinking water; safeguarding and restoring our agricultural landscapes and seascapes; implementing measures that support the production and consumption of healthy foods rich in vitamins and minerals; and also, very importantly, supporting traditional food cultures and knowledge.

We cannot do all of this alone, or in isolation, so all of you have a role to play, as individuals and consumers, and as active participants and advocates in the many larger organizations you are a member of-- from your family, to your work, to your local community, to your country, and to the entire international system.

So, I invite you all to take action, to be an agent of positive change in safeguarding our biodiversity and therefore our food and our health. You can contribute your initiatives to the Sharm El-Sheikh to Kunming Action Agenda for Nature and People by registering on our website at the Convention of Biological Diversity.

I wish you a happy and healthy International Day of Biodiversity. Thank you

