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INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE

“LIVING IN HARMONY WITH NATURE”

Note by the Executive Secretary

INTRODUCTION

1. The Conference of the Parties, in decision XII/2 C, paragraph 4, invited the Executive Secretary, subject to availability of resources, to facilitate the organization of an interactive dialogue on living in harmony with nature at the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, and invited the United Nations General Assembly to make available to the Conference of the Parties at its thirteenth meeting the outcomes of the interactive dialogues on harmony with nature of the United Nations General Assembly.
2. Accordingly, an interactive dialogue session will be held during the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.
3. The present document reviews consideration of the concept of “Living in harmony with nature” and related concepts under the Convention and related processes, drawing upon the outcomes of previous dialogues held under the Ad Hoc Open-ended Inter-sessional Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions (section I), and the United Nations General Assembly (section II), and sets out some proposals for the conduct of the interactive dialogue at the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (section III).

I. CONSIDERATION OF “LIVING IN HARMONY WITH NATURE” UNDER THE CONVENTION AND RELATED PROCESSES

4. “Living in harmony with nature” is the theme of the 2050 Vision of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 adopted at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. The full vision statement is: “Living in harmony with nature”, where “By 2050, biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored and wisely used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people.”¹
5. According to the multi-year programme of work of the Conference of the Parties up to 2020,² the Conference of the Parties is due to consider approaches to living in harmony with nature at its fourteenth meeting. Thus, the dialogue may provide an opportunity to advance preliminary thinking on this concept.

* UNEP/CBD/COP/13/1.

¹ Decision X/2, annex.

² Decision XII/31.

6. The Conference of the Parties has adopted a number of standards and guidelines that may be considered as particularly relevant to the concept of living in harmony with nature in that they aim to ensure that humanity lives within ecological limits and the Earth biodiversity continues to be available to future generations. Of particular relevance is the ecosystem approach which is considered as the primary framework of action to be taken under the Convention.³ The ecosystem approach is a strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promote conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way. It is based on the application of scientific methodologies focused on levels of biological organization which encompass the essential processes, functions and interactions among organisms and their environment. It recognizes that humans, with their cultural diversity, are an integral component of ecosystems. The ecosystem approach can be understood in terms of its 12 Principles and five points of operational guidance.⁴

7. The preamble of the Convention recognizes the close and traditional dependence of many indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles on biological resources, and the desirability of sharing equitably benefits arising from the use of traditional knowledge, innovations and practices relevant to the conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of its components. Many indigenous peoples and local communities with long attachment to their traditional territories (lands and waters) are living proof of lifestyles in harmony with nature. At the same time these communities have shaped and often enhanced biodiversity, ecosystems and land and seascapes to create enduring and resilient biocultural systems. Article 10(c) of the Convention commits to protecting and encouraging customary use of biological diversity, and, at its twelfth meeting, the Conference of the Parties adopted the global Plan of Action on Customary Sustainable Use of Biological Diversity.⁵

A. In-depth dialogues held under the auspices of the Working Group on Article 8(j)

8. The Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity has held three in-depth dialogues on thematic areas and other cross-cutting issues. The summaries of the dialogues are annexed to the reports of the respective meetings for information and advice.

9. The in-depth dialogue on ecosystem management, ecosystem services and protected areas held at the seventh meeting of the Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions, emphasized the recognition of Indigenous Protected areas (IPA) or Indigenous Peoples and Local Community Conserved Territories and Areas (ICCAs) and the importance of customary sustainable use for long-term ecosystem sustainability.

10. The in-depth dialogue held at the eighth meeting of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Article 8(j) in 2013, concerning Connecting traditional knowledge systems and science, such as the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, including gender dimensions, discussed the benefits of bringing traditional knowledge and science together for good practices in ecosystem management. It emphasized the importance of respecting and incorporating traditional science, along with science into ecosystem management and to that extent, provides useful advice about improving the knowledge base for sustainable ecosystem and landscape management.

11. The dialogue also explored the potential of traditional knowledge and science in the context of the International Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). Noting that different worldviews underpin different knowledge systems, issues of accessibility and governance, and traditional hierarchies of knowledge systems needed to be taken into account when designing an overall conceptual framework for the integration of different knowledge systems. Such a framework should give equal importance to all worldviews and epistemologies.

12. The topic of the in-depth dialogue held at the ninth meeting of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions was “challenges and opportunities for international and regional cooperation in the protection of shared traditional knowledge across borders

³ Decision II/8.

⁴ Decision VI/6.

⁵ Decision XII/12 B, annex.

for the strengthening of traditional knowledge and the fulfilment of three objectives of the Convention in harmony with Nature/Mother Earth”.

13. The dialogue explored the regional protection and transboundary measures for the protection of shared traditional knowledge. Panellists shared their experiences with the sharing and protection of traditional knowledge among indigenous cultural communities in the Pacific. The issue of sharing and protecting traditional knowledge across national borders was also taken up along with further consideration of community protocols for the access and use of traditional knowledge.

14. Overall, the in-depth dialogues held under the auspices of the meetings of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions have advanced their original goal of assisting with the integration of Article 8(j) on traditional knowledge and Article 10(c) on customary sustainable use across the other areas of work of the Convention. Thus, the effective implementation of the Convention's articles on traditional knowledge and customary sustainable use is underpinned by the effective participation of indigenous peoples and local communities across the areas of work of the Convention contributing to living in harmony with nature.

B. The IPBES Conceptual Framework

15. The IPBES Conceptual Framework is a highly simplified model of the complex interactions between the natural world and human societies. The model identifies the main elements, together with their interactions, that are most relevant to the Platform's goal and should therefore be the focus for assessments and knowledge generation to inform policy and the required capacity-building. Salient innovative aspects of the conceptual framework are its transparent and participatory construction process and its explicit consideration of diverse scientific disciplines, stakeholders and knowledge systems, including indigenous and local knowledge. In this sense, the conceptual framework is a tool for the achievement of a shared working understanding across different disciplines, knowledge systems and stakeholders that are expected to be active participants in the Platform, and is intended to be a basic common ground, general and inclusive, for coordinated action towards the achievement of the ultimate goal of the Platform.⁶

II. INTERACTIVE DIALOGUES OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON HARMONY WITH NATURE

16. Since 2009, the General Assembly has adopted eight resolutions on harmony with nature, including one designating 22 April as International Mother Earth Day. Around this day each year from 2009 to 2015, the United Nations General Assembly has held a series of dialogues.⁷

17. At the dialogues, experts from around the world working in the field of natural and social sciences have presented the need for an evolved and holistic worldview that must be rooted in respect for nature and in the interdependence of the well-being of humankind and of the Earth. Humanity is an inextricably part of the community of life on Earth, and the experts state that we cannot override the laws that maintain the homeostatic balances of the Earth System. Economic growth for some has been achieved at the expense of the natural world as well as many human populations.

18. Dialogues at the General Assembly have considered topics such as:

- (a) How humans can better reconnect with the world around them (first dialogue, 2011);
- (b) Scientific findings on the impacts of human activities on the functioning of the Earth System (second dialogue, 2012);
- (c) Different economic approaches to further a more ethical basis for the relationship between humanity and the Earth (third dialogue, 2013);
- (d) Possible key characteristics of a new, non-anthropocentric paradigm and the further identification of strategies on how society subsequently would need to function consistent with this paradigm (fourth dialogue, 2014);

⁶ <http://www.ipbes.net/conceptual-framework>; <http://www.ipbes.net/publication/d%C3%ADaz-et-al-2015-rosetta-stone-nature%E2%80%99s-benefits-people-plos-biology-13-1>.

⁷ The reports of the dialogues sessions and resolutions are available at: <http://www.harmonywithnatureun.org/documents.html>.

(e) Achieving sustainable development goals including addressing climate change in the post-2015 development agenda (fifth dialogue, 2015);

19. Thus, over the years, General Assembly resolutions have increasingly recognized the importance of giving due consideration to non-anthropocentric, or Earth-centred, worldviews to promote living in harmony with nature. At the core of these worldviews is the recognition of the intrinsic value of nature, within which relationships between humankind and the planet are symbiotic, interconnected and subject to the natural laws of the universe.⁸

20. For example, on 22 December 2015, the General Assembly adopted resolution 70/208, specifically acknowledging Earth Jurisprudence in advancing Harmony with Nature. Earth Jurisprudence recognizes that the Earth is the source of laws that govern life. It provides a cohesive framework that underpins many disciplines weaving them together to create a more effective, holistic governance approach, one that reflects the integrated nature of the world in which we live. Earth Jurisprudence inspires citizens and societies to reconsider how they interact with the natural world. Indigenous peoples' philosophies, spiritualities and traditional forms of knowledge worldwide express the understanding that human governance systems must be derived from the laws of the Earth and comply with them.

21. Most recently, on 24 December 2015, the General Assembly adopted its seventh resolution (70/208) on Harmony with Nature to:

“Initiate, in 2016, a virtual dialogue on Harmony with Nature among, inter alia, experts on Earth jurisprudence worldwide, including those who have been active in the interactive dialogues of the General Assembly, in order to inspire citizens and societies to reconsider how they interact with the natural world in order to implement the Sustainable Development Goals in harmony with nature, noting that some countries recognize the rights of nature in the context of the promotion of sustainable development, and requests that the experts submit a summary to the General Assembly at its seventy-first session.”

This dialogue occurred during the General Assembly held in September 2016 and presented an opportunity to build upon the first steps taken in recognizing the rights of nature, which took place during the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012. Heads of State and Government adopted the outcome document entitled “The future we want”,⁹ in which they recognized that planet Earth and its ecosystems are our home and that some countries recognize the rights of nature in the context of the promotion of sustainable development. They also agreed that, in order to achieve a just balance among the needs of present and future generations, it is necessary to promote Harmony with Nature.

22. “Harmony in Nature” is recognized in “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”,¹⁰ under Sustainable Development Goal 12, target 12.8, which states that Member States should ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness needed for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.

III. PURPOSE AND FORMAT OF THE INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE ON “LIVING IN HARMONY WITH NATURE”

23. It is proposed that the methodology of the dialogue will involve presentations by a panel of experts in plenary, followed by an interactive dialogue with meeting participants, chaired by a representative of the Bureau or the Executive Secretary. At least one hour will be allocated to the interactive dialogue.

24. The Executive Secretary will invite a geographically and gender balanced group of experts to present a series of views on “living in harmony with nature”. Expert panellists may be drawn from Parties, indigenous peoples and local communities and the scientific community. The theme of the Vision of the Strategic Plan “Living in Harmony with Nature” was based on proposals made by Japan

⁸ A useful chronology with highlights of the resolutions is available at: <http://www.harmonywithnatureun.org/chronology.html>.

⁹ General Assembly resolution 66/288, annex.

¹⁰ General Assembly resolution 70/1, annex.

(host of the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties) during the consultations on the development of the Strategic Plan. The dialogues under the General Assembly, and the dialogue to be undertaken at the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, have been or are being held on the basis of proposals of the Plurinational State of Bolivia. Thus, panellists may be drawn from these two countries, among others.

25. The panellists may address questions such as the following:

(a) How can different worldviews inform actions to achieve the 2050 Vision of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?

(b) What actions can be taken at different levels to address access, customary sustainable use, and more broadly sustainable use of biodiversity, including at local and other levels?

(c) What actions can be taken at different levels to mainstream the concept of living in harmony with nature across the various sectors, including but not limited to agriculture, fisheries, forestry and tourism?

(d) How can rights-based approaches and the customary laws of indigenous peoples and local communities promote living in harmony with nature, considering multiple and/or diverse views, and legal pluralism?

(e) What are the latest developments regarding Earth jurisprudence worldwide, promoting the rights of nature;

(f) Can a “rights of nature” approach be in harmony with “human rights-based approach”?

(g) What role does gender play in promoting living in harmony with nature?

(h) How can science, together with traditional knowledge, inform approaches to living in harmony with nature?

26. As with established practice, a summary report of the dialogue will be annexed to the report of the Conference of the Parties at its thirteenth meeting.

27. The outcome of the dialogue may inform preparations for the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties on the issue of approaches to living in harmony with nature.
