

Keynote address of Prof. Zakri Abdul Hamid, Chair, IPBES at the seventeenth meeting of SBSTTA, CBD, Montreal 14-18 October, 2013

Mr. Chairman

Distinguished delegates

Ladies and gentlemen

Being in this hall, addressing this august gathering is both an honour and a privilege for me. On a more personal level, it is a sentimental and nostalgic homecoming as I recall my time as the Chair for the third and fourth meetings of SBSTTA in the late 1990s. Then and now, this subsidiary body of the Convention on Biological Diversity has always been an important organ of the CBD and IPBES looks forward to working closely with you in furtherance of the three objectives of the CBD.

Eight years ago, I had the great honour of helping to lead one of the world's largest collaborative scientific research efforts to that time, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, which I co-chaired with my great friend Sir Bob Watson of the UK.

I'd like to read to you a key message from that report's Biodiversity Synthesis -- a statement with which I am sure we would all agree today:

“To achieve greater progress toward biodiversity conservation to improve human well-being and reduce poverty, it will be necessary to strengthen response options that are designed with the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services as the primary goal. These responses will not be sufficient, however, unless the indirect and direct drivers of change are addressed and the enabling conditions for implementation of the full suite of responses are established.”

Since then, we have taken some significant actions, including adopting the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, within which the first two strategic goals reflect the need to address the drivers of change.

Similarly, we have also adopted the 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets and we are seeing drivers of change addressed in updated national biodiversity strategies and action plans. In many places now, biodiversity considerations are being mainstreamed -- in sectoral plans and policies as well as development plans and poverty reduction strategies.

These are promising developments. Because achieving properly integrated effort requires more than an understanding of biodiversity, more than data on changing habitats and species populations, more even than an ability to calculate the dollar value of certain components of biodiversity and the ecosystem services they provide.

The forester may tend to reduce sustainability to an equation between off take and regrowth; a fisher between harvest and reproductive capacity of stocks.

Making production and consumption patterns of societies sustainable, however, demands that we go beyond computing and balancing of inputs and outputs, that we reach beyond expertise in natural sciences, economics and policy development.

Transforming societies requires a fundamental dialogue between large segments of society, broad understanding of concepts such as bio-capacity and ecological limits (what some refer to as “planetary boundaries”), and ultimately agreement about the choices we face and the solutions we need.

Though it also draws on information from other knowledge systems, the CBD’s Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice, does not include what some might call “soft” social sciences - a poor choice of word given how hard it is to address the issues involved!

Yet we need to discuss how to influence and change behavior other than through scientific logic.

I believe SBSTTA will need to give more attention to the social sciences. And I believe the Convention needs to reach out to and work with and through additional partners who can address these issues.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The new Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), which as many of you will know I am chairing, is developing its Conceptual Framework. And I am pleased to say social science issues are being accorded a central position in that framework.

The draft framework, developed at a workshop in Cape Town, South Africa in August, recognizes that institutions and governance, and drivers of change for biodiversity and ecosystems, have critical implications for biodiversity, ecosystem services and human well-being.

SBSTTA chair, Mr. Gemedo Dalle Tussie, representing the scientific subsidiary bodies of all related multilateral environmental agreements, attended the workshop to support alignment with the IPBES.

Since March this year we have been drafting the IPBES work programme through 2018.

It is designed to put the Platform on the right path, firmly establishing deliverables, credibility, relevance, legitimacy, reputation and working modalities, based on a collaborative approach and a high volume of in-kind contributions.

It will pave the way for the incremental strengthening of the science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services across scales, sectors and knowledge systems. It contains a sequenced and prioritized set of objectives, deliverables, actions and milestones for advancing the four functions of the Platform at relevant scales.

The work programme also strives to balance our focus on capacity building, assessment and policy support tools.

In Cape Town, a number of scoping documents were prepared for consideration at the second IPBES plenary session a few short weeks from now. The scoping documents cover fast track, thematic and methodological assessments -- deliverables on which the highest priority have been placed.

I encourage you all to look through these documents if you have not already done so, and look forward to your thoughts.

I also cordially invite all here to the side-event scheduled during tomorrow lunch time, at which the Interim Secretariat of the IPBES will detail the proposed five year work programme, describe the prioritization of requests IPBES has received, and define deliverables. And on Wednesday we will introduce the provisional agenda for IPBES-2, and what might be considered further by SBSTTA-17 to contribute in the operationalization of the Platform.

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to confirm

Allow me to take this opportunity please to express my sincere gratitude to the Government of Turkey for hosting IPBES2 from December 9 to 14 in the beautiful ancient city of Antalya.

This session will be a historical event for all of us involved in conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services. We will consider the conceptual framework for IPBES and anticipate adoption of our first programme of work, along with financial and budgetary arrangements and various rules and procedures.

Other important elements, such as the Strategic Engagement Strategy, guidelines on developing strategic partnerships, and the institutional arrangement of the Platform, will be tabled as well.

Ladies and gentlemen, needed at both national and international scales are dialogues across divides, a common understanding of societal priorities, and a joint strategy to mobilize all available resources and move in the same direction.

At the core of all these, is the role of science, technology and innovation in sustainable development, in particular the pivotal function of a body like

SBSTTA in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. And the time has never been more opportune than now for our voices to be heard. Recently I was appointed to be a member of the newly-established UN Secretary-General's Scientific Advisory Board and among other imperatives, I would be happy to be a conduit to any of your concerns.

I am delighted to be here in your company, eager to hear about the insights and recommendations of the SBSTTA and its implications for the work of IPBES, and I look forward to seeing many of you this December in Antalya.

Thank you for your attention.