



**Convention on  
Biological Diversity**



2010 International Year of Biodiversity

## **STATEMENT**

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**THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE  
CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE**

**EXPERT WORKSHOP ON SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL ASPECTS  
RELEVANT TO ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT IN MARINE  
AREAS BEYOND NATIONAL JURISDICTION**

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Distinguished experts,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this important Expert Workshop on Scientific and Technical Aspects Relevant to Environmental Impact Assessment in Marine Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction. I would like to first extend my sincere appreciation to the Government of Philippines and the Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA) for generously hosting and the European Commission for providing financial support for the Workshop in this beautiful city of Manila.

The opening of this Workshop at this period of time in Manila is particularly meaningful as it is being organized in conjunction with the East Asian Seas Congress 2009, which is an indication of the leadership provided by the Philippines in sustainable ocean and coastal development. I am also happy to announce that Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and PEMSEA will sign an MOU during the East Asian Seas (EAS) Congress 2009 to formalize our existing cooperation. In view of the remarkable contribution of PEMSEA to the implementation of integrated marine and coastal management, I believe our strengthened cooperation will further enhance the implementation of Jakarta Mandate and the programme of work on marine and coastal biological diversity.

Despite various efforts made at the national, regional and global levels toward meeting 2010 biodiversity target to achieve a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss, recent global marine environmental assessments have observed serious declines in marine living resources, losses of coastal habitats, elevated pollution levels, and poor water quality in many areas. More significantly, overall deterioration of the marine environment is being exacerbated by the effects of climate change, and coastal communities and local economies are adversely impacted by such trends as poverty, land use changes, overfishing, nutrient loading, sewage, and coastal developments, which put the capacity of the marine environment beyond its sustainable limit.

An equally serious situation is also observed in deep-seabed habitats, which were long perceived to be a biological desert, but host a wealth of species. For example, hydrothermal vents were the first ecosystem on Earth found to be independent from the sun as an original source of energy, relying instead on chemosynthesis. Deep-sea hydrothermal vent organisms tolerate great extremes in water temperature and survive potentially toxic concentrations of heavy metals. They are therefore of particular interest because of their adaptation to a high pressure and high temperature environment. Seamounts and the water column above them serve as important habitats, feeding grounds, and reproduction sites for many open-ocean and deep-sea species of fish, sharks, sea turtles, marine mammals, seabirds, and benthic organisms of great variety. As such, seamounts may form biological hotspots with a distinct, abundant and diverse fauna, and sometimes contain many species new to science. Cold-water coral reefs may be many thousands to millions of years old. Because of their age and slow growth rates, reefs contain high-resolution records of long-term climate change and may also be important speciation centres in the deep sea.

With the rapidly increasing speed of scientific and technological advancement in accessing the once hidden deep sea habitats and resources, human activities impose threats on sustainability of these valuable ecosystems in unprecedented pace and intensity. The adverse impacts of global climate change, such as ocean acidification, further compound the situations at

global scale, and limit our scientific and managerial ability to respond in timely and adequate manner. For example, the forthcoming CBD publication on scientific synthesis on the impacts of ocean acidification on marine biodiversity shows that increasing ocean acidification reduces the availability of carbonate minerals in seawater that are important building blocks for marine plants and animals, and by 2100 it has been predicted that 70 per cent of cold water corals, key refuges and feeding grounds for commercial fish species, will be exposed to corrosive waters. This publication will be launched at the forthcoming fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate in Copenhagen to raise the awareness of policy makers and public on its possible serious consequences.

As an effective way of addressing these threats to marine biodiversity, the Convention on Biological Diversity, together with the Ramsar Convention and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), have introduced impact assessment to ensure that development is planned and implemented with biodiversity in mind. The CBD thus requires Parties to apply impact assessment to projects, programmes, plans and policies with a potential negative impact on biodiversity.

Although many countries apply impact assessment processes, biodiversity is often inadequately addressed in implementing impact assessment. Among others, key barriers include low priority for biodiversity; limitations in capacity to carry out the assessments; low awareness of biodiversity values; and lack of adequate data. To address these barriers, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in its eighth meeting endorsed the voluntary guidelines on biodiversity-inclusive environmental impact assessment and the draft guidance on biodiversity-inclusive strategic environmental assessment in decision VIII/28.

Subsequently, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention at its ninth meeting invited Parties, other Governments and relevant organizations, to cooperate in further developing scientific and technical guidance for the implementation of environmental impact assessments and strategic environmental assessments for activities and processes under their jurisdiction and control which may have significant adverse impacts on marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction. The Conference of the Parties requested that the work should be undertaken in the context of the United Nations Ad Hoc Open-ended Informal Working Group to study issues relating to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction, and take into consideration the work of Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), and other relevant organizations. The Parties also highlighted the need to ensure that such activities are regulated in such a way that they do not compromise ecosystem integrity and noted the need for capacity-building for developing countries, in order to fully implement existing provisions of environmental impact assessment, as well as the challenges and difficulties in carrying out environmental impact assessment in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

We are therefore here today to scientifically and technically support countries in expanding their current efforts on impact assessment to the marine areas beyond national jurisdiction for the conservation of valuable biodiversity in the remote part of our oceans. Our efforts will focus on enhancing the existing CBD guidelines with respect to their scientific and technical relevance to marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction. The workshop results will be submitted for the consideration of the Convention's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice at its next meeting, scheduled for May 2010.

Finally, I would like to invite all of you to join hands with us in celebrating the International Year of Biodiversity (IYB) in 2010, together with Parties, partners of the Convention and other global communities. In particular, I am happy to inform you that the international celebration of IYB will culminate in a gathering of Heads of State and Government on 20 September 2010 at United Nations Headquarters in conjunction with the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly. I therefore wish to encourage you to collaborate closely with the Secretariat to take advantage of this valuable opportunity to bring the challenges of marine biodiversity conservation to the attention of high-level policy makers.

With this, I wish you productive deliberations and successful outcomes.

Thank you for your attention.