



**OPENING STATEMENT BY
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at the
2018 UNITED NATIONS BIODIVERSITY CONFERENCE**

**Fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity
Ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol
Third meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol**

**17-29 November 2018
Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt**

Thank you, Yasmine, for that kind introduction. Colleagues, as you know, I have said many times that, for us to make progress as a convention, we need leadership and we need champions. *We have in Dr. Fouad both a leader and a champion.* Thank you, Yasmine, for your tireless work to safeguard biodiversity in Egypt, in the region, and across the world. I am so proud to be able to work together with you, and to be able to call you a friend, a partner, and a sister in this shared struggle.

I also want to thank your entire team — and the entire Government of Egypt — for the tremendous efforts they have undertaken in planning this Conference. I also want to especially thank the Governorate of South Sinai and the City of Sharm El-Sheikh for the warm hospitality we have received, and for all the efforts of all those who have made us feel so welcome here.

Having a conference on nature conservation and sustainable use in one of the world's most beautiful and ecologically important places reminds us of the critical responsibility we all have and of the rewarding aspects our work offers. So, thank you for the chance to come here and see the actions being taken to ensure the sustainability of this magnificent place.

Most importantly, I want to thank the people of Egypt. As we all know well, for millenniums, Egypt has been at the forefront of human civilization. Throughout that time — from the banks of the Nile River to the shores of the Red Sea — Egypt has shown us that sustainable development and care for nature can go hand-in-hand. They ultimately depend upon each other.

And we are so proud and grateful that the President of Egypt welcomes us all here personally on behalf of the people of Egypt. Thank you, Your Excellency President El Sisi, for your presence and your leadership on this critical global issue.

I also want to acknowledge and thank the Government of Mexico, and Ambassador Octavio Tripp, for the past two years of leadership of the Conference of Parties, and for the tremendous advances that you have enabled. Similarly, I want to thank the Government of China, which will host the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in Beijing in 2020. The next two years will be led by Egypt but will involve close coordination with China and with all other countries and numerous stakeholders.

Safeguarding life on Earth is a truly global issue-- one that affects all of humanity and, indeed, all species on this one small planet that we call home. And so, I am also grateful that we are going to receive some words from the President of the seventy-third session of the United Nations General Assembly, H.E. Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garces, who is demonstrating that the entire world is with us today in spirit.

Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you all to the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol, and the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol.

Colleagues, we are gathered here at a pivotal moment. Twenty-five years ago, the Convention on Biological Diversity entered into force. In these past 25 years, we *can* point to meaningful progress on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. For example, the annual rate of net forest loss has been halved over the past 10 years, global protected areas have increased to 13 per cent of coastal and marine areas and 15 per cent of terrestrial areas, and the number of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture secured in conservation facilities has risen.

And yet, these successes are not enough to halt the ongoing loss of plant and animal diversity on Earth — a fundamental worldwide extinction crisis, deepening every year, and severely impacted by — and also severely driving — climate change.

And so, as many of you have heard me say: as a species, we now face a stark choice. We can stay on the path we are currently on: the continued and accelerated destruction of nature (the shared infrastructure of life!).

This path holds cascading consequences for nature in all ecosystems and on climate, including tipping of transitioning earth from a carbon sink to a carbon emitter. This path also holds cascading consequences for humankind: from the global economy, to global health, to the availability of water and food, to human security.

OR we can work together *as a convention and as a larger global movement* to choose a different path. The path of conservation, restoration and transformation. This choice is fast upon us. If we do not act, we soon may reach tipping points that may cause irreversible destruction to nature and ultimately humankind.

By 2020, we must accelerate achievement of the Aichi Targets and adopt a new, post-2020, framework.

By 2030, we must bend the curve of biological diversity loss or risk irreversible damage to nature, with permanent consequences for humankind and all life on Earth.

By 2050, we must achieve our vision of living in harmony with nature. And so, as part of our agenda this week, we will hold a dialogue on 20 November on the theme “Approaches of Living in Harmony with Nature” to hear different perspectives on creating the pathway to realizing this critical vision.

I know that this is a grand challenge that we are undertaking – and that our success as a convention and as a species is by no means assured. Yet, I am optimistic. And I hope you will find my optimism contagious.

Just in the last three days, we have reached a series of new milestones and accomplishments. On Tuesday, we held the African Ministerial Summit with representation from more than 30 countries. This summit resulted in two positive outcomes: the African Ministerial Declaration on Biodiversity and the Pan African Action Agenda on Ecosystem Restoration and Resilience.

Wednesday and Thursday, we held both our high-level segment meeting with the theme “Investing in People and the Planet” and our Business and Biodiversity Forum.

And we were pleased to announce as a secretariat, in conjunction with the Governments of Egypt and China, the Sharm el-Sheikh to Beijing Action Agenda for Nature and People. This Action Agenda will be hosted on an online platform that will allow for the collection, coordination and celebration of activities undertaken by all stakeholders in support of our common goal — safeguarding all life on Earth, including our own. On Thursday, we also announced the launch of a new initiative on nature and culture together with UNESCO and IUCN.

But our work in Sharm El Sheikh is just beginning. We will be discussing a number of crucial strategic issues, including:

- Key measures to accelerate and scale actions to further advance the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, and review progress made towards the 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets;
- Deciding on the process for developing the post-2020 global biodiversity framework;
- Long-term strategic directions to the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity, which lays out a new approach to living in harmony with nature by 2050;
- Mainstreaming of biodiversity in crucial economic sectors which are set to expand massively in the coming decades: such as energy and mining, infrastructure, manufacturing and processing as well as health;
- Cooperation with other conventions, international organizations and initiatives.

We also have a number of critical technical issues to address, including but not limited to:

- Spatial planning, protected areas, and area-based conservation;
- Voluntary guidelines for the design and effective implementation of ecosystem-based approaches to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction;
- Supplementary voluntary guidance for avoiding unintentional introductions of invasive alien species associated with trade in live organisms;
- An updated plan of action 2018-2020 for the International Initiative on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Pollinators;
- Voluntary guidance for a sustainable wild meat sector;
- Procedures for avoiding or managing conflicts of interest in expert groups;
- Item related to Article 8(j) and related provisions, including voluntary guidelines for the repatriation of traditional knowledge relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity;
- Digital sequence information on genetic resources;
- Synthetic biology;
- Marine conservation issues are high on the agenda, including ecologically or biologically significant marine areas;
- Resource mobilization, reporting, capacity-building, knowledge management and communications, and other critical issues.

I am also pleased that, as with the last meeting of the Conference of the Parties, we have three meetings taking place concurrently. The simultaneous convening of the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the meetings of the Parties to the Nagoya and Cartagena Protocols demonstrates the close coordination and integration between three critical processes.

As usual, there are also a number of different parallel and side events that will contribute substantially to the outcomes of this Conference. Running in parallel with the main meeting are the Rio Conventions Pavilion, the Communication, Education, and Public Awareness Fair, the Nature and Culture Summit, the second Wildlife Forum, Sustainable Oceans Day, the Global Biodiversity Summit of Cities and Subnational Governments, and the Biodiversity Innovations and Solutions fair, among many others.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation to the Governments of Australia, Canada, Egypt, Finland, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland, and the European Union, which have provided generous financial support to ensure that participants from developing countries as well as representatives of indigenous peoples and local communities are able to attend this Conference. I thank them for their active and continued support to the Convention.

Colleagues, we have an exciting and pivotal two weeks ahead of us.

And let us not forget why we are ultimately here. Amidst all the complicated and critical negotiations we face, never forget that we are here to fight for nature and to fight for ourselves as well.

After all, we are part of nature. Nature is not something just “out there”-- or “set aside” to be preserved apart from us. We are nature. Nature is you, and it is in our hearts and our souls, and every fibre of our bodies.

This is a truth all our ancestors knew well, wherever we come from. Our ancestors honoured nature because they lived in and from nature. I think of my own grandmother, who stitched this traditional Romanian dress by candlelight — out of natural fibres, out of nature itself — and, through, it stitched her connection both to nature and her homeland and to me today and hopefully to you, too.

This is the type of connection we must preserve and pass on for our children and their children’s children. We must create a world that lives in harmony with nature for them!

I wish you well in your deliberations, and I encourage you to never lose sight of that goal.

I encourage you to be bold and wise in your decisions. And I am committed to standing with you and facilitating your discussions throughout.

Thank you, and I wish you all success towards our common endeavour of safeguarding all life on Earth.
