



STATEMENT BY

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ON THE OCCASION OF

**CAPACITY-BUILDING WORKSHOP FOR SUBREGIONS OF ASIA ON THE
RESTORATION OF FORESTS AND OTHER ECOSYSTEMS TO SUPPORT THE
ACHIEVEMENT OF THE AICHI BIODIVERSITY TARGETS**

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**Convention on
Biological Diversity**

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Distinguished Delegates,
Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to welcome you all to this capacity-building workshop on ecosystem restoration for subregions of Asia. We are privileged to organize this workshop at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, where we will have the opportunity to listen to a diverse collection of best practices and lessons learned on the restoration efforts from a variety of countries in the region.

Due to its geological history, this region is fortunate to contain high levels of species richness, exceptionally rich ecosystems and exclusive reservoirs which safeguard much of the biodiversity found on Earth. Regrettably, with increases in anthropogenic pressures including the conversion of natural habitat to other land uses and the rise in human densities, this region is greatly susceptible of putting much of this biodiversity and its precious ecosystem services at risk.

Throughout this workshop you will be listening to your fellow regional counterparts describe: (a) how country experts have been examining the status and trends of habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation, and delicately crafting solutions to address their most pressing ecosystem challenges; (b) how community management has alleviated reoccurring driver of loss and integrating experiences on rights-based approaches; (c) how the private sector can engage and influence sustainable supply chains; and (d) how partner organizations can inspire, motivate and support countries in carrying out assessments and planning within the broader landscape. The answers to these questions lie within a range of stakeholders and will be illustrated throughout the week.

We must remain mindful, however, that the challenge is considerable. The barriers and obstacles tend to come from outside the forest and environment sectors. They tend to be political and economic in nature, and charged with a suite of interests that often undermine conservation objectives. Moreover, data collection to measure the state, condition and trends of natural ecosystems is often uneven. From a review of Parties' national reports and national biodiversity strategies and action plans, few Parties have presented quantitative and specific information on the drivers of loss and the opportunities to reverse such losses. This makes the task of defining clear, achievable and measurable national targets under Aichi Targets 5, 14 and 15 an urgent priority.

Accordingly, this workshop will focus on a review of national targets and commitments for the conservation and restoration of natural ecosystems. In doing so we will review national commitments and their stage of implementation; present best practices in ecosystem conservation and restoration from experts in the field; review relevant tools in support of countries implementation plans; and discuss opportunities for resource mobilization to support countries' implementation plans.

At the end of this workshop we expect participants to be able to return to their countries with a better understanding of ways to address data gaps in the short term; to harness countries' national targets and identify ecosystem conservation and restoration tools and techniques. Moreover, we expect participants to gain a better understanding of progress made and type of support needed to support actions to achieve Aichi Biodiversity Targets 5, 14 and 15.

Positively, a review of Parties' national reports and national biodiversity strategies and action plans demonstrates that a number of countries in the region have already demonstrated a commendable commitment to ecosystem restoration. China, Thailand and Viet Nam initiated massive nationwide restoration programmes, which greatly enhanced their forest cover. China expanded its forest cover from 8.6 per cent in 1949 to 22.1 per cent in 2015, increasing its forest area by over 120 million hectares. The Government introduced huge restoration programmes and planted 12 billion trees on 4.25 million hectares of land. In 2014, Thailand initiated the ASEAN Forest Project to reforest areas connected to neighbouring countries in order to create healthy and fertile forest complexes serving as the "Lungs of ASEAN". In the 1990s, Viet Nam started two large restoration programmes that increased forest cover from 35.6 per cent in 2000 to 47.6 per cent in 2015.

As the first country to sign the Bonn Challenge, India is another leader in the region. The Bonn Challenge, a global aspiration to restore 150 million hectares of the world's deforested and degraded lands by 2020, aims to support these existing global commitments through the setting of area-based commitments by governmental and non-governmental organizations. As of May 2016, the Challenge has received 31 pledges amounting to 96.13 million hectares of land targeted for reforestation or restoration, or 64 per cent of the overall target. India's commitment under the Bonn Challenge represents 13 million hectares, or 8.6 per cent of the overall target, and has a particular connection to achieving the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The Indian Government not only hosted the eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, but also spearheaded the Hyderabad Call for a Concerted Effort on Ecosystem Restoration in October 2012, together with the Governments of the Republic of Korea and South Africa, as COP presidents of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, as well as by the heads of many international conventions and organizations, who called for coordinated long-term efforts to mobilize resources and facilitate ecosystem restoration activities for the benefit of all. Most recently in CBD decision XII/19 on ecosystem conservation and restoration, Parties reaffirmed the need for enhanced support and cooperation to promote ecosystem restoration efforts of developing countries.

Notably in 2014, at the first Asia-Pacific Rainforest Summit, stakeholders including those from rainforest governments in the Asia-Pacific region, donor countries, leading civil society organizations and international forestry agencies, supported a proposal to work together to develop an Asia-Pacific Rainforest Recovery Plan. The Plan includes goals of: (a) halving the rate of loss of rainforests in the region by 2020; (b) ending natural rainforest loss in the region by 2030 by adopting the principles of sustainable forest management; (c) encouraging the private sector to eliminate rainforest deforestation from the production of palm oil, paper and timber products no later than 2020; (d) restoring an agreed area of degraded rainforests in the region by 2020 and increasing targets by 2030.

During the nineteenth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice the Secretariat was tasked to develop a Plan of Action on Ecosystem Restoration. This plan was presented and well received during the twentieth meeting of the Subsidiary Body in April 2016. In the light of this, the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice has recommended that the Conference of the Parties adopt the short-term action plan on ecosystem restoration in its thirteenth meeting, to be held in December 2016.

Ladies and Gentleman,

We all must remain aware, however, of the several threats to biodiversity that the region faces. Continued action is required to conserve the global wealth of biodiversity both at national and regional level. Better accounting of the potential impacts of ecosystem restoration on biodiversity can help to ensure that restoration activities deliver the greatest possible benefits, including ecosystem services such as the provision of water, food, fuel and other resources, as well as erosion control in support to local livelihoods. Moreover, it can also help to build resilient ecosystems that are better able to cope with stresses and enable adaptation to climate change, while contributing to carbon sequestration.

We therefore convene this workshop here with a spirit of hope to learn from the experience of all the countries in the region on how we can best conserve and restore biodiversity and achieve the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020. At this workshop, we will focus on three Aichi Biodiversity Targets: (a) to halve the rate of loss of natural habitats, including forests, and reduce degradation and fragmentation (Target 5); (b) to restore and safeguard ecosystems that provide essential services (Target 14) and (c) to restore at least 15 per cent of degraded ecosystems (Target 15). There is a need for a coherent approach to these targets and actions taken to achieve them complement many other targets. Making progress in these areas clearly requires inter- and cross-sectoral approaches with the full participation of governmental authorities, focal points, indigenous peoples and local communities, the private sector and other stakeholders.

It is therefore a great pleasure to have here a range of experts from the countries of this region. We are also fortunate to have experts from different organizations, including from academia and business. This diversity of experience will foster a fruitful exchange of views in helping to identify critical pressures undermining ecosystem health and resilience and promoting integrated actions across a landscape of sectors.

In closing, let me take this moment to extend my heartfelt admiration to our national, regional and global partners who significantly contribute to restoration work on the ground and who further reiterate their support by being here with us today. I wish to thank the Government of the Republic of Korea through the Korea Forest Service for generously providing the necessary financial support for this workshop, and to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations for supporting delegates from the forestry sector. Thank you for participating and sharing your expertise with us.

I look forward to open discussions and concrete and practical outcomes from this workshop.

Thank you