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SUBSIDIARY BODY ON SCIENTIFIC, TECHNICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADVICE

Subsidiary Body on ImplEmentation

Special virtual session on biodiversity, One Health and COVID-19

Online, 15-16 December 2020

# Report on the special virtual session of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice and the Subsidiary Body on Implementation: Biodiversity, One Health and COVID-19

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# I. INTRODUCTION

1. The twenty-fourth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice and the third meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation were rescheduled from May 2020 to August 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Subsequently, they were rescheduled to November 2020, and finally delayed, sine die, to 2021.
2. In that context, and with a view to maintaining momentum towards the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, and to facilitate preparations for the meetings of the subsidiary bodies in 2021, a joint special virtual session of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice and the Subsidiary Body on Implementation was scheduled for 15 and 16 December 2020.
3. As agreed by the Bureaux of the Conference of the Parties and the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice, the special session addressed the theme of biodiversity, One Health and the response to COVID-19. It provided opportunities for the presentation of information and for statements by Parties and observers in all the official languages of the United Nations, but no decisions or formal recommendations were taken at the session.

II. Opening of the second joint special virtual session

The second joint special virtual session was opened at 8 a.m., Eastern Daylight Time, on Tuesday, 15 December 2020, by Mr. Hamdallah Zedan on behalf of the President of the Conference of the Parties. He said that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic had affected many and he expressed solidarity with all Parties and observers, and especially with those who had lost loved ones or suffered special hardship from its effects. He thanked them for participating in the session and for their patience as the start of the meeting had been delayed to ensure that everyone was properly connected to the virtual format and he expressed the hope that the session would allow Parties and observers to gain further familiarity with the online platform and with the procedures for conducting virtual meetings. He expressed thanks to the Executive Secretary and her staff for the preparations they had made for the session, and the members of the Bureau of the Conference of the Parties for their support for its organization.

The pandemic had highlighted the importance of the relationship between people and nature, and the President of the Conference of the Parties, Her Excellency Ms. Yasmine Fouad, had hosted an international webinar on that topic in September. The Heads of State and Government at the recent [United Nations Summit on Biodiversity](https://www.cbd.int/article/2020-UN-Biodiversity-Summit), held on 30 September 2020, had also emphasized that link, and many had called for increased efforts to conserve biodiversity to reduce the risks of future pandemics. Currently, many countries were developing and implementing economic stimulus and recovery packages to allow their countries to build back from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The present session provided an opportunity to further examine those links between biodiversity and health, including the links between biodiversity loss and the emergence of zoonotic diseases, and to consider how they could be taken into account in efforts to “build back better”. The discussions would lay the ground for further consideration of those issues at the twenty-fourth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice and the third meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation which would further develop the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, and maintain momentum towards the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

**A. Statement by the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity**

Ms. Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, also welcomed the participants and expressed her sympathy and solidarity with those who had lost loved ones or suffered hardship during the pandemic. She said that their participation in the session demonstrated their support for keeping up momentum on an ambitious journey to Kunming, China.

The participants were living in extraordinary times and were experiencing an interlocking crisis of biodiversity loss, environmental degradation and climate change, compounded by a health crisis that had transformed the world. Out of that unprecedented challenge, however, there was an opportunity to rebuild the relationship with nature and ensure that the protection and sustainable use of biodiversity was integrated into policies that would guide the post-pandemic economic and development recovery. The underlying causes of pandemics were the same global environmental changes that had driven biodiversity loss and climate change. The links between pandemic risk and biodiversity loss added further weight to the need to address the drivers of biodiversity loss and prevent or reduce the risk of future pandemics. While daunting, options to address and minimize those risks not only existed but were tangible and should be included in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework as it had been developed for adoption at the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, and then implemented in the following years.

A number of issues had to be considered: integrating human health considerations into land use planning; improving the regulation and management of the safe harvest, transport, and use of wildlife, as well as making it legal and sustainable; reforming and transforming food and agricultural systems, particularly the management of livestock; and promoting responsible consumption. Recognizing and addressing the linkages between the management of biodiversity and pandemic risk should be part of a broader One Health approach which, as set out in the fifth edition of the *Global Biodiversity Outlook*, was an inclusive, transdisciplinary and cross-sectoral approach that recognized the intrinsic connection between human health, animal health and the health and resilience of nature.

Reducing disease risk through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity would be highly cost-effective. Pandemics and emerging zoonoses caused widespread human suffering and trillions of dollars in economic damages, strategies to prevent them by reducing biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation, and limiting the wildlife trade, would cost much less. That provided a strong economic incentive for transformative change to reduce the risk of pandemics. The world was standing at a crossroads. Recovery out of the pandemic would either lock in an unsustainable path of development or enable societies to rebuild and unlock the relationship with nature and ensure a world in which every person had dignity and prosperity and could live in harmony with nature.

**B. Statements by the Chair of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice and the Chair of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation**

1. The Chair of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice, Mr. Hesiquio Benitez Díaz (Mexico), thanked Mr. Zedan for opening the session and the Executive Secretary for her statement. He also acknowledged the continued support and guidance of the Presidency of the Conference of the Parties and the Bureaux in the preparations for future sessions of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice and of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation. The current session would provide opportunities for the presentation of further information and statements by Parties and observers, but he remined them they would take no decisions or make any formal recommendations at the session and that interpretation had been provided for them in all the official languages of the United Nations.

The Chair of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation Ms. Charlotta Sörqvist (Sweden) said that the purpose of the session was both to maintain the momentum of the intergovernmental process and to provide an opportunity for all stakeholders to share their views on several essential themes that were highly relevant in a rapidly changing world. The timely discussions would cover the important interlinkages between biodiversity and health, the One Health approach, and the collective response to the COVID-19 pandemic. She also highlighted the virtual aspect of the meeting, which would provide Parties and observers with an opportunity to further familiarize themselves with the procedures for conducting virtual meetings. Together, they would continue to develop their own best practices for making maximum use of the online platform. She said that, during the preceding year, they had made great progress in adjusting and adapting to the new virtual venue and she sincerely hoped that the positive trend could continue.

The Chair of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice said that biodiversity, health, the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including through the One Health approach, were currently the focus of global science, policy and management debates. The participants had before them interesting and useful documents, prepared by the Secretariat, highlighting the latest knowledge and thinking on those topics and which provided the basis for finding the best ways to “build back better” after the pandemic. More specific and detailed information could be found in several reports and papers, including from the World Health Organization (WHO), the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and many other organizations, references to which were to be found in the pre-session and information documents.

The topic for the session had been suggested by the Bureau of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice and had been supported by both the Chair of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation and the Bureau of the Conference of the Parties as the topic was highly relevant for both the work of the subsidiary bodies of the Convention and many items on the agendas of the upcoming meetings of the subsidiary bodies. It was also highly relevant to the post-2020 discussions. He said that, while there would be no formal outcomes from the session, the deliberations might provide useful and additional information and serve as a basis for further discussions in the upcoming year.

He also reiterated that one of the goals of the session was to test all aspects of the online meeting format that might be applied to future sessions of the subsidiary bodies. That joint experience could build trust in, and facilitate learning about, the new platform and allow for smooth and productive future meetings of the subsidiary bodies. Together with the Chair of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation and the Secretariat, he would capture and analyse the experiences and lessons from the session and share the results with both Bureaux.

# iii. Presentations BY PARTNERS

The participants heard presentations from: Mr. Peter Daszak, Chair of the IPBES Workshop on Biodiversity and Pandemics and President of the EcoHealth Alliance; Ms. Cristina Romanelli, speaking on behalf of Ms. Maria Neira of WHO; Ms. Pamela McElwee, Lead Author of the *Global Assessment of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services* of IPBES;[[1]](#footnote-2) and from Mr. Mark Zimsky of the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

**A. Presentation of Mr. Daszak**

Mr. Daszak said that IPBES had brought together a group of experts to investigate, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the relationships between biodiversity, environmental change and pandemics. They had found that there was clear scientific evidence that the risk of pandemics was growing and that the cost they entailed would be enormous. His group estimated that those costs from emerging diseases were on the order of between half a trillion and a trillion dollars per year in economic damage alone; the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic had been on the order of $16 trillion. There was an urgent need to deal with pandemics as the risks of pandemics, and their drivers, were increasing over time, and dealing with a COVID-19-type event each decade, their expected frequency, would be unsustainable.

1. The IPBES workshop had called for transformative change to go beyond responding to pandemics and to prevent them. Every pandemic during the past hundred years had been caused by zoonotic diseases that had their origin in animals, and he listed the most recent examples. The causes of pandemics were not the animals involved, however, but the interaction with those animals and, in particular, the interaction with wildlife. The underlying drivers of emerging diseases were land use change, deforestation and urbanization, agricultural expansion and intensification, the wildlife trade and the consumption of wildlife and their products. Those had been linked to a whole series of prior pandemic outbreaks as well as COVID-19. To that list could also be added climate change, which would be more significant in the future. While those drivers were difficult to measure, there was clear scientific evidence of their link to the risks of pandemics. One of the reasons for the emergence of new diseases was that each species carried its own viruses and microbes, of which there was enormous diversity, the extent of which was unknown. An estimated 1.7 million viruses were circulating in mammals and birds alone, any one of which had the potential to become pandemic in human beings. He said that identifying those microbes could lead to vaccines, other drugs and other treatments, such as new antibiotics.

The policy options and frameworks outlined in the report of the IPBES Workshop on Biodiversity and Pandemics[[2]](#footnote-3) were both new and significant, and it might be possible to bring together a One Health approach in dealing with pandemics, that described the relationship between the environment, people and animals. He called for an intergovernmental council on pandemic prevention that did not just focus on dealing with outbreaks as they emerged but tried to prevent them. The scientific data demonstrated the need to coordinate the frameworks to monitor the emerging disease risk and block it, which could be achieved by building a framework that brought together an understanding of trade and the associated risks of the spread of disease. The economic impacts of pandemics had to be brought into the risk planning process. Large-scale projects involving deforestation, road building, infrastructure development and agricultural intensification or expansion all had an inherent risk of introducing diseases. That needed to be assessed before engagement in those projects, particularly as the costs of those projects might be larger than the benefits they generated. It was becoming clear that the business-as-usual approach to development was not making the world a better place for either human beings or wildlife to live in.

He said that there was an increased risk of emerging diseases and the economic shocks they caused: there would be more pandemics that would emerge more quickly, spread further, kill more people and crash the global economy more frequently than in the past. As the world waited for a vaccine for COVID-19, there had been 79 million cases of the disease worldwide. If there had been a trillion dollars in economic damage attributable to the pandemic, that was two orders of magnitude greater than the cost of designing the sorts of programmes that would reduce the risks of pandemics in the first place.

**B. Presentation of Ms. Romanelli**

Ms. Romanelli said that the world was living in an unprecedented moment, with the pandemic demonstrating that all communities were intimately linked to the natural world. No single event in modern history had been more illustrative of the intimate connections between people, other living beings and the ecosystems that nurtured life on earth. WHO had long been aware of the intimate mutual relationship between people and the planet and, over the past decade, had strengthened its commitment to working with partners, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and UNEP, through a joint work programme on biodiversity and health. It was committed to working across sectors to strengthen holistic approaches, such as One Health, that brought together human, animal and ecosystem health as foundational pillars of global health security. WHO had been working for over a decade on One Health, in close collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) to address threats at the interface between humans, animals and ecosystems by promoting cross-sectoral collaboration. At the global level, WHO was making a concerted effort to work with FAO and OIE, to join with UNEP in an alliance to better integrate the environmental determinates of health into the One Health approach.

She said that biodiversity was the foundation of human health and that many of the underlying drivers of disease emergence cut across a large range of human practices that were both destructive to nature and wildlife, and amplified disease risk. Among those were large-scale deforestation, livestock and agricultural development, resource extraction, uncontrolled infrastructure development, urbanization, and the production, trade and regulation of wild and domestic species used as food and medicines. Those, coupled together with other environmental, social and economic determinants of health, and human behaviour, drove the potential for diseases to emerge and spread.

The COVID-19 pandemic had increased public awareness that human health was intimately bound to a relationship with nature. While the exact origin of COVID-19 remained unknown, it was ultimately related to humanity’s broken relationship with the natural world. Over the past 50 years, the majority of new zoonotic pathogens affecting human beings had largely been the result of ecologically destructive human activities. Even before the current pandemic, scientific evidence had shown how land use changes were associated with an increase in infectious disease outbreaks, both zoonotic and also vector-borne. Those changes included deforestation and intensification of agricultural production via the use and misuse of pesticides, fertilizers and antibiotics in food production for livestock, all of which were associated not just with emerging infectious diseases but also with outbreaks of endemic diseases. Those drivers not only drove biodiversity loss and disease emergence but were also driving climate change, something which was also having a negative effect on human health. As the world focused on COVID-19, and on zoonotic diseases and pandemics, it should not forget that biodiversity loss was at the heart of many communicable diseases which were leading causes of morbidity and mortality globally. Unhealthy diets were responsible for 11 million adult deaths each year; yet, nutrition security was rarely considered in One Health approaches. The current meeting was an opportunity to discuss expanding that vision, an effort to which WHO was deeply committed.

It had been four years since the comprehensive publication *Connecting Global Priorities: Biodiversity and Human Health: A State of Knowledge Review*[[3]](#footnote-4) had been considered by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity,[[4]](#footnote-5) but its key messages were even more relevant now. Biodiversity was not only linked to diseases but also sustained health, including through nutrition and food security, the provision of clean air and fresh water, and by providing opportunities to support mental and physical health. Conservation and the sustainable use of biodiversity built social and ecological resilience, and conferred protection against the devastating impacts of climate change and other disasters. The scientific evidence had shown that a quarter of the global burden of disease was attributable to avoidable environmental factors. She encouraged the participants to consider a broader vision of One Health and on how to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Decisions on how to build back better in the post-COVID-19 era would either ameliorate damaging economic patterns or promote a healthier, fairer and greener world. WHO had released a manifesto which recognized that human, animal and ecosystem health were intrinsically interconnected. It provided a means to monitor, prevent and respond to future health threats by expanding the scope of One Health to ensure that prevention efforts integrated mechanisms linked across different spheres and took into account different variables, such as unsustainable consumption and production. It also considered other public health threats, such as anti-microbial resistance, and amplifying risk factors, such as climate change. She encouraged the participants to consider the six pillars of the WHO manifesto for a healthy, green and just recovery, noting that the first pillar was based on the protection of nature.

**C. Presentation of Ms. McElwee**

Ms. McElwee spoke about a recent paper[[5]](#footnote-6) on ensuring that a post-COVID economic recovery tackled global biodiversity loss, and she shared some of the findings of that study. That paper aimed at understanding how the post-COVID economic agenda could achieve both stimulation of economies, and reduction of unemployment, while also addressing the key drivers of biodiversity loss, particularly those identified in the 2019 IPBES *Global Assessment*. She said that direct drivers, such as land use change and direct exploitation, climate change, pollution and invasive species, were underpinned by a series of indirect drivers, such as economic growth. The study had looked at the IPBES *Global Assessment* for specific actions targeting the underlying economic drivers that could be inserted into post-COVID recovery plans. It had evaluated options that aimed at fixing the economy and might be implemented by economic or finance ministries, rather than ministries of environment. She said that, while increased funding for protected areas would likely also have economic benefits, it was primarily a biodiversity goal and only secondarily a goal of economics. Consequently, the study had highlighted primarily economic actions that could also have positive effects on biodiversity or, at the very minimum, structure economic options so that they did no harm to nature. She said that very few of the existing and proposed recovery plans had taken up the best potential measures for that.

Existing recovery packages had used a number of approaches and economic tools. Central banks had played important roles in asset purchasing, although few conditions had been imposed on recipients of liquidity funding, and there had been criticism that much of the funding had gone to fossil fuel companies or into sectors that might harm biodiversity. She said that having “do no harm” safeguards in place for central banks, for both climate and biodiversity, would help guide the cash infusions to greener options. There were other national measures to consider, including those targeting businesses and individuals, that ranged from strengthened safety nets and emergency bailouts to changes in tax structures and rates. Many of those could be made more biodiversity-friendly, or at least not harm biodiversity. That was important because some of the measures might have had unintended negative effects, particularly as there had been a rush to disburse such funds. One example had been the reduction in value added taxes (VATs), which might also increase unsustainable consumption. A more targeted reduction in VAT on certain green goods, such as electric vehicles or sustainably grown food, would have been more appropriate.

There were a range of potentially positive actions in existing and proposed country-level strategies, but, overall, more attention had been given to climate change than nature. Only the European Union had a combined approach, but even that was less supportive of biodiversity than climate. Some countries had targeted biodiversity, commonly through restoration or afforestation funding and green jobs. She said that, for both short-term and long-term biodiversity-positive economic measures, the important issue was the number of tools available. Possible initiatives included green bonds for biodiversity, universal basic income, or measures to nudge more sustainable consumption through increased caps on resource use. One particular area where there were multiple benefits for both biodiversity and economic recovery was green jobs. Government-supported work programmes could both reduce widespread unemployment and, through jobs in ecological restoration, bring biodiversity and climate benefits. Those conservation jobs could be scaled up rapidly as they did not rely on the introduction of new technological or expanded production. A recent survey among economists had noted that stimulus measures focusing on green sectors were rated as being the most economically effective measures; other measure, such as airline bailouts were rated as the worst option for creating jobs and economic growth. She said that, while the number of jobs and costs depended on the context, a recent report in Australia had estimated that an investment of A$4 billion would create over 50,000 jobs in nature-related activities. In the United States of America, under the Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, investments in the marine restoration sector had generated more jobs per million dollars invested than investments in many other sectors. However, only a handful of countries, such as India, New Zealand, Pakistan and Uganda, currently had green employment in their post-COVID packages and they had already made a priority of green jobs in their existing national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs) or green growth strategies.

Biodiversity had to be included in COVID-19 economic recovery packages, and such investments would enable the needed transitions for the 2050 Vision of living in harmony with nature. There were strong arguments for economic efficiency, employment gains, and equity benefits in such biodiversity-focused measures. There was also a risk of harm to biodiversity in some current recovery packages and approaches, which included reduced regulatory standards, reduced resource taxes, and fossil fuel subsidies, all of which would make it difficult to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement.[[6]](#footnote-7) Key areas that were ripe for immediate attention included: sustainable agriculture, greener production and supply chains, improved environmental, social and governance investment standards and rules, restoration and other jobs, and a range of climate and biodiversity nexus approaches, such as nature-based solutions. She encouraged environment ministries to work with finance ministries to design appropriate packages containing short‑term stimulus and long-term recovery options and suggested that the Conference of the Parties to both the biodiversity and climate change conventions include, at their upcoming meetings, reports on post-COVID investments to better understand what had been prioritized, what had worked and what had failed.

**D. Presentation of Mr. Zimsky**

Mr. Zimsky reported on the activities of the COVID-19 response task force of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) which had been convened to identify the risks and opportunities that the COVID-19 pandemic presented. The task force was composed of like-minded organizations, including GEF agencies, conservation non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and health and philanthropic foundations, all of which had generously invested their time and expertise to help consider how best to tackle the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The key thematic topics covered had been: wildlife trade and consumption; sustainable forest management in the Amazon; food systems, land use and restoration; nature-based tourism; indigenous peoples and behaviour and systems change.

The disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic had proven to both be insidious and widespread, and it had been decided early on to start examining what could be done to ameliorate the impacts of the pandemic and to put in place measures that could mitigate the emergence of new zoonotic diseases. He said that three areas of that work, protected areas and landscape management, food systems and land use, and global wildlife trade, could each play a central role in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. The work of the task force had been divided into short, medium and long-term objectives. A greater focus on the wildlife trade and consumption challenges through the GEF Global Wildlife Programme had been envisioned, as had the need to speed up analyses of the future risks of emerging infectious diseases of a zoonotic nature. Guidelines had also been introduced for all GEF projects on how to deal with the pandemic in project design and on how GEF investments could start contributing to green recovery efforts. The task force would also provide guidance to the GEF-8 cycle, which would begin its negotiations in early 2021. Another major output of the task force had been the GEF COVID-19 Response Strategy White Paper, which had helped to identify the future risks linked to emerging infectious diseases and was not restricted to topics that were currently within the purview of GEF.

# iv. Statements

The Chair of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation then called on the Secretariat to introduce the documents that had been prepared to facilitate the deliberations. She remined the participants that while the session would provide opportunities for the presentation of information, and for statements by Parties and observers, no decisions or formal recommendations would be made, and that the statements being made would be without prejudice to future statements at the regular sessions of the subsidiary bodies. The statements made by the regional groups, Parties, international organizations and major groupings of civil society organizations are to be found on the website of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity.[[7]](#footnote-8)

The special session had before it the programme for the special session ([CBD/SBSTTA-SBI-SS/2/1](https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/42ff/5aed/ebc21dd82c8451364f6625fd/sbstta-sbi-ss-02-01-en.pdf)) and a discussion note by the Executive Secretary for the special virtual session ([CBD/SBSTTA-SBI-SS/2/2](https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/44f2/38b3/cf38b99f5527f600c19e3c09/sbstta-sbi-ss-02-02-en.pdf)). It also had before it, as an information document, a note by the Executive Secretary on technical information on biodiversity and pandemics ([CBD/SBSTTA-SBI-SS/2/INF/1](https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/2abd/08b3/123a81e9d2b3b9d6eb0dd9b8/sbstta-sbi-ss-02-inf-01-en.pdf)).

## A. Statements by regional groups and Parties

*1. Statement of the African Group*

Speaking on behalf of the African Group, the representative of South Africa recognized the work performed under the Convention regarding health and biodiversity, including recent activities undertaken by the Secretariat in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The African Group noted with appreciation the report of the workshop convened by IPBES, and studies conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and UNEP. The fifth edition of the *Global Biodiversity Outlook* had also recognized the full range of linkages between biodiversity and all aspects of human health, and had addressed the common drivers of biodiversity loss, disease risk and ill health. He said that the emergence of COVID-19 had reframed the discussions on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and had demonstrated that Governments had to take a holistic and multisectoral approach to prevent, or at least decrease, the severity of future pandemics. The One Health concept, which had gained traction due to COVID-19, provided a framework that addressed issues beyond health, including issues of livelihoods and food security. That provided an important framework for ensuring the sustainable use of biodiversity and the equitable sharing of its benefits which could result in conservation outcomes for the good of people and the planet. In order to avert future planetary and human health catastrophes, policies had to keep in mind low-income and marginalized communities, wild and domestic animals, and the environment. He remained concerned about the impact of the pandemic on Africa, which had resulted in thousands of fatalities.

The current COVID-19 pandemic had come at a moment when the prospects for many African countries had been promising. It had clearly demonstrated that biodiversity-rich countries were heavily dependent on revenues from tourism to support their conservation efforts. It had also exposed the entrenched inequalities in those societies. The pandemic should not delay the right of women to access, contribute to, and meaningfully participate in decision-making and policy development to ensure a gender-responsive approach that was appropriately budgeted for in programmes targeting the development of women and girls; it had to be ensured that no one was left behind.

The African group was of the view that mainstreaming of biodiversity into different sectors was crucial given the current impact of zoonotic diseases on their economies. The programme of work on biodiversity and human health under the Convention needed to be enhanced, and the current draft global biodiversity framework needed to reflect a specific target on that. Recovery plans needed to incorporate biodiversity into monitoring plans and so ensure the sustainable use of biological diversity on which many communities in Africa continued to depend for their livelihoods. Such recovery plans should include indicators that: assessed the health and well-being of people, addressed livelihoods, assessed political will and favourable policy conditions, ensured resource mobilization so that the recovery plans and activities were fully resourced; ensured that the provision of resources for biodiversity was central to the elements incorporated into the post-2020 global biodiversity framework; and assessed the physical changes in land use and land cover over time. The One Health approach was a key solution to the biodiversity challenge affecting nature, and actions needed to be framed around an immediate response, recovery and reorientation of the global economy to ensure a rights-based approach that limited the burden on developing countries and ensured that they were able to meet their development imperatives and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.[[8]](#footnote-9)

*2. Statement of the Central and Eastern European region*

Speaking on behalf of the countries of the Central and Eastern European region, the representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina said that the region joined with other Parties to the Convention in recognizing the importance of the multiple linkages between biodiversity and human health. Among the people of her region, that deep-rooted understanding did not just speak to such linkages but also to a direct dependence of human health on healthy ecosystems in the environment. That was true in other parts of the world as well and had been embedded in different civilizations since their beginnings in various forms, from traditional medicine to the need for a healthy environment to support mental health. Accelerated urban development and living apart from nature had created a need to re-learn the importance of biodiversity.

In that regard, the countries of the region, which had been strongly affected by the pandemic, welcomed the revival and strengthening of the One Health initiative, as well as the conclusions of the IPBES Workshop on Biodiversity and Pandemics. They were aware that the One Health initiative, without a reduction of the drivers of biodiversity loss, could not bring satisfactory results on its own. The reduction and effective regulation of the direct drivers of biodiversity loss would be impossible to achieve without comprehensive work to reduce the indirect drivers as well, which included: poverty, social insecurity and the human, technical, administrative and other capacities for sustainable nature management, as well as the inadequate regional connections that affected a large part of the region.

The Convention could significantly contribute to a sustainable response to COVID-19, and other possible pandemics, through the strengthening of regional and subregional platforms for cooperation. A green recovery for the Central and Eastern European region should provide support for efforts to meet existing threats and challenges to nature and not just promote immediate economic growth, thus ensuring a healthy environment and livelihoods in the longer term. The recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic was an opportunity to promote policy changes that could restructure both the Central and Eastern European region and the global society.

The recently adopted Sofia Declaration[[9]](#footnote-10) was aimed at promoting and implementing a new growth strategy towards a modern, climate-neutral, resource-efficient and competitive economy under the framework of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans.[[10]](#footnote-11) The Biodiversity Task Force of South-East Europe[[11]](#footnote-12) was one such mechanism aimed at strengthening regional cooperation and strategic planning on biodiversity conservation and the implementation of commitments under the Convention. At a time when the world was connected by a pandemic, a consequence of unsustainable development, the Central and Eastern European region considered that the establishment of the new global biodiversity framework was an opportunity for a long-term shift in human behaviour towards nature. It called for the Parties to the Convention to develop an efficient and long-lasting framework, which, while not neglecting the efforts made thus far, would also be feasible for all.

Such a shift in human behaviour could not, however, be qualitatively and permanently achieved without systemic changes in education on biodiversity and in national conservation plans. The development of that should be given more space and should be of better quality, especially when addressed to youth. In the current situation, classical education in biology and other natural sciences was not functional and did not further a good understanding or awareness of the importance of nature for human lives. The Convention, through the global biodiversity framework, should bring together partner organizations and institutions and further that change in education on biodiversity. Joint action in that regard should be implemented on global, regional and national scales. The pandemic was a major global health and economic challenge, but challenges had served civilizations in the past as an opportunity for learning and making further progress and she expressed the hope that that would also be true again.

*3. Statement of the European Union*

Speaking on behalf of the European Union and its member States, the representative of Germany said that the European Union and its member States expressed their deepest compassion towards the victims of both the COVID‑19 pandemic and the economic and social consequences that it had caused. It was a challenging time that had particularly harsh effects on the vulnerable. She thanked the Chairs of the subsidiary bodies, and the Secretariat, for organizing the session. The European Union and its member States appreciated the efforts to advance the development of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework; it was urgent to continue that process. The risk of pandemics was increasing rapidly around the world, and science had shown that among the underlying causes of pandemics were the same global environmental changes that had driven the loss of biodiversity and climate change: human disruptions in ecosystems. Poaching as well as an illegal, poorly regulated and insufficiently controlled trade in wild animals and products had increased the risk of pandemics through an increased chance of zoonotic spillovers. The COVID-19 pandemic was a reminder that human health, biodiversity loss and climate change were interdependent, and that biodiversity and climate were crucial for both human well-being and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. It was of the utmost importance that the planetary emergency was tackled in an integrated way with the transformative changes that were needed to ensure that no one was left behind.

The risk of zoonotic infectious diseases and pandemics could be reduced by learning the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic and acting accordingly. First, those lessons had to be translated into the overall ambition of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework in order to take the necessary actions to protect, restore and sustainably use biodiversity. There was, for example, a need to increase, and effectively manage, protected areas. There was a need to tackle the drivers of biodiversity loss effectively, and goals and targets needed to reflect the necessary ambition to achieve those actions. Second, the One Health approach had to be applied and to encompass the interconnections between human, animal and environmental health, which should be clearly and explicitly reflected in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and incorporated into cross‑cutting and sectoral strategies and action plans. Third, the response to the current health and economic crisis had to be both green and just for a better recovery and to achieve sustainable and resilient societies. Biodiversity, climate and the environment as a whole needed to be placed at the heart of COVID-19 recovery strategies; how the economy was stimulated and resources allocated in response to the crisis would either increase or reduce the pressure on biodiversity and the climate. The report of the IPBES Workshop on Biodiversity and Pandemics clearly showed that the cost of pandemic prevention was only a small fraction of the cost of pandemics and of their economic and social impacts.

In closing, she urged preventive action and assured the participants that the European Union and its member States stood ready and were committed to working hard with them to develop and implement an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework, a framework which would also contribute to reducing the risk of pandemics and support a nature-positive, resilient economic and social recovery.

*4. Statement of the JUSCANZ Group*

Speaking on behalf of Australia, Canada, Iceland, Israel, Monaco, New Zealand, Norway and Switzerland, the representative of Australia commended the efforts of all those involved in convening the session and expressed her appreciation for all the work done to address the important interlinkages between biodiversity and human health that had been highlighted in the discussion note prepared by the Executive Secretary. She welcomed the theme of the session and said that, in the light of the recent pandemic, it was more important than ever that the significance of environmental health and its intrinsic link to human health was truly appreciated. The rapid decline in biodiversity was difficult to overstate; the encroachment on the natural environment was a major driver of the emergence of pandemic threats, such as COVID-19. It was critical for the new framework to ensure that the conservation of biodiversity was a crucial part of the process of “building back better”, thereby lowering the risk of new pandemics. Previous silos had to be broken down and the importance of biodiversity respected across all areas of life, including human health. For the sake of ecosystems, it was important that international organizations and Parties worked together to understand, as much as possible, the intersections of human, animal and environmental health, and zoonoses, as encapsulated by the One Health approach. All must work with pace and purpose, and foster the involvement of all to help each safeguard everyone else. All had to fully engage in that challenging task in order to bend the curve on biodiversity loss, and in doing so create a safer and healthier world for everyone. She said that JUSCANZ looked forward to productive and successful discussions on the subject at the current session.

**B. Statements by Parties**

Statements were made by representatives of Brazil, Malaysia, Mexico and Switzerland.

Deliberations continued on Wednesday, 16 December 2020.

Further statements were made by representatives of Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Cameroon, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Finland, France, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Turkey, Uganda and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The representative of Austria informed participants that the Government of Austria had decided to support the work of the Convention on “biodiversity and health” with a voluntary contribution of €12,000.

## C. Statements by international and civil society organizations

Statements were made by representatives of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Statements were also made by representatives of the CBD Alliance, the CBD Women’s Caucus, the Global Youth Biodiversity Network, the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity, and subnational and local governments.

*1. International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity*

The representative of the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB) spoke of the second Global Thematic Dialogue for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, which had been held from 1 to 3 December 2020 and said that, in preparation for that dialogue, IIFB had organized more than 20 regional webinars to discuss the zero draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.[[12]](#footnote-13) On the basis of the outcomes of that dialogue,[[13]](#footnote-14) IIFB had made a number of recommendations.

She said that indigenous peoples protected biodiversity as they understood its connection to health and the effects of the destruction of biodiversity on forests, animals, rivers and plants, which included traditional medicine, and the impacts that had on their daily life, food, spirit and well-being. If countries ensured the protection of their biodiversity, then humanity could be better prepared to manage pandemics, including COVID-19, which had affected many indigenous peoples and local communities, who lived in communities where there were generally no adequate health centres or nearby hospitals and where medical personnel and medicine were generally unavailable. She said that the interlinkages between biodiversity, health and the risk of pandemics needed to be reflected in a global biodiversity framework that recognized the traditional medicine of indigenous peoples and local communities and their customary, sustainable use and management of biodiversity, wild animals and plants.

The current version of Target 19 in the draft monitoring framework for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework,[[14]](#footnote-15) on information and traditional knowledge, needed to be revised as it did not reach the standards set by Aichi Target 18. It should contain a strong recognition of, and support for, traditional knowledge, innovation and practices and their role in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in accordance with all the progress that had been made so far under the Convention on Biological Diversity. Further, the current versions of Targets 4, 8 and 9 in the monitoring framework did not recognize customary sustainable use, which included housing, traditional medicine, and food sovereignty for indigenous peoples and local communities, including women and youth.

The global biodiversity framework needed to take a human rights-based approach and should include a target on the recognition of the lands, territories, and waters of indigenous peoples and local communities in accordance with their customary laws, governance systems and management practices, and should value the interrelationship between culture and biological diversity. The global biodiversity framework had to contain a strong obligation for Parties to protect and restore nature, and recognize the rights of indigenous peoples. In conclusion, IIFB recommended that any recovery plan following the pandemic should be inclusive and respect Mother Nature, the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous peoples and local communities and the rights of indigenous peoples. Such a human rights-based approach would contribute to planetary and human health, and a strong recognition of the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples and local communities in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

*3. Global Youth Biodiversity Network*

The representative of the Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN) said that the COVID-19 pandemic, which had caused devastation for so many, was a failing of currently unsustainable, oppressive, and dysfunctional systems. Once again, the hardest hit had been those who bore the brunt of structural inequality through unequal access to health care, nutrition, basic services, education, and other human rights. What was needed was a genuine intention for the massive, concerted and transformative changes needed to rebuild for the good of all societies, future generations and the planet. The current year had made clear that healthy societies were underpinned by a healthy planet. The pandemic had caused many to rethink their lifestyles and to improve their health and the health of their communities, and more value was being given to ensuring access to healthy and nutritious food, as well as green spaces, traditional medicine, and nature’s potential to heal both physically and mentally.

Youth, women and indigenous peoples and local communities had much to contribute to an inclusive approach to One Health. Learning from the pandemic meant that the post-2020 global biodiversity framework had to recognize the human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. It was essential to stop thinking in silos and address the root causes of the problems and the interconnectedness of the biodiversity, health, climate, and cultural crises. It needed to be recognized that nature and culture were inextricably linked, and that the connections between them had to be rebuilt and reflected in the development of goals and targets.

Efforts also had to be undertaken to prevent pandemics from reaching indigenous peoples and local communities as they posed grave threats to their continued survival. An effort had to be made to learn from their knowledge and values as they had deeply understood the interconnectedness of people and nature for millenniums. The key roles, knowledge and contributions of women in community health, resilience, conservation and the sustainable use of biodiversity also had to be recognized. Rapid and unplanned land use change, agricultural intensification, unsustainable wildlife trade and other activities, all of which also put human health at risk, had to be addressed as well. Increased resources needed to be invested in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Intergenerational equity needed to be assured when rebuilding from the pandemic. That would lay a foundation that would prevent future generations from experiencing even worse conditions. Finally, urgent and transformative actions that went beyond “building back better” had to be undertaken. There was a need to rethink before rebuilding in order to move towards a future with more resilient, fair and sustainable societies, living in harmony within nature and humanity.

*4. CBD Women’s Caucus*

The representative of the CBD Women’s Caucus said that ensuring social justice and gender equality was an essential principle for a biodiversity-inclusive approach to One Health. Gender differences posed unique health risks for men and women during their life cycles, whether considered in their biological, social, or economic aspects. The diverse roles played by women and men created different exposures to domestic animals, wildlife and the environment. Gender inequalities interacted with other inequalities related to ethnicity, socioeconomic class and age. Gender differences needed to be addressed to better understand the risks and develop effective controls and response strategies to achieve better outcomes.

Gender had also played a significant role in shaping the response to infectious disease. In the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, glaring gender disparities had been apparent. There had been additional burdens placed on women that had effects, among them social, cultural and economic, in all spheres of their lives. The pandemic had resulted in increased tensions and had contributed to new cases of gender-based violence, including many linked to the environment. Health and well-being were essential to the enjoyment of other human rights such as education, freedom of speech, free movement, and work. Women were on the frontlines and part of the solution to safeguarding biodiversity, something demonstrated in the One Health approach. Women actively defended their lands and territories; they were keepers of traditional knowledge, including that related to natural medicines and use of biodiversity for protecting communities from diseases. They were nurturers and protectors of the future generations and warriors in the face of the pandemic, acting as primary caretakers of the sick. Despite those contributions, they were neither adequately recognized as rights holders nor fully involved in decision-making.

Her group encouraged Parties to reflect on those issues. They should acknowledge that actions should be mutually supported and that respect for human rights, including those of indigenous peoples and local communities and small farmers, populations in which women and girls were key actors, should underpin the aims of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,8 including for One Health. She recalled the recent wildfires in the Amazon that had destroyed over 100,000 square kilometres of forest, killing millions of wild animals and destroying whole ecosystems. That had been one of the most significant threats to the planet’s biodiversity and was an ecocide that must not be forgotten. It would not be possible to “recover and build back better” if the curve of inequality and injustice was not bent as well, or the relationship with nature, including biodiversity, was not adequately addressed.

*4. Subnational and local governments*

The representative of subnational and local governments said that the COVID-19 pandemic was a reminder of the increased risk of zoonotic diseases arising from the unsustainable interactions between human and natural systems. Going forward, there was a need to redesign cities and regions in order to recover the healthy biodiversity and ecosystem services. That was vital for human health and its well-being and were based on socioeconomic systems that were in harmony with nature. He said that local and subnational governments currently stood on the frontlines of the pandemic and were taking urgent and concrete actions across all sectors to confront it. They took the nature, health and climate agendas, as well as the One Health approach, very seriously.

The Convention could further contribute to the One Health approach by supporting the formal recognition by Parties of the actions of local and subnational governments. The inclusion of local and subnational governments in the development and implementation of recovery measures would ensure that the responses to the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and helped to “build back better”. The interlinkages between biodiversity, health and pandemic risk should be reflected in the implementation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, as suggested by the Edinburgh Declaration.[[15]](#footnote-16) That could be achieved by strengthening capacity-building and increasing resource mobilization in order to implement nature-based solutions and green and blue infrastructure, particularly through ecosystem-based approaches at the local and subnational levels.

In conclusion he said that together with the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity the local and subnational governments were ready, and wanted, to be part of the solution to ‘build back better’ and redesign a shared future in harmony with nature, within planetary boundaries, through a whole of government and a whole of society approach.

*5. CBD Alliance*

The representative of the CBD Alliance expressed his solidarity with all those who were suffering from the COVID-19 pandemic. Achieving One Health for people and the planet required a profound change in human behaviour that had to be based on both common but differentiated responsibilities and a return to, and active enforcement of, the principles of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Little had changed in recent iterations of the draft global biodiversity framework as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. That draft had to be fully revised to properly reflect the three pillars of the Convention. The draft had to reflect the rights of those whose lives were most closely intertwined with the health of biodiversity: indigenous peoples and local communities, women, youth and small farmers. The volume of spending committed to the economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that was potentially harmful to biodiversity far outweighed the volume of spending that was beneficial to it. The global biodiversity framework needed to change that through legally binding commitments and not voluntary pledges. There had to be strong accountability and compliance mechanisms, and a strong rights-based approach that supported One Health and One Welfare. The pandemic was the result of humanity’s relationship with biodiversity but, more specifically, the way food was produced: the intensive livestock sector was not only a leading driver of biodiversity loss but also a significant breeding ground of zoonoses. It also was a key cause of climate change, and was associated with a range of social, environmental, health and animal welfare problems. Now was not the time to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in multi-story pig farms, as some development banks had done in post-pandemic stimulus packages. Such packages, as well as taxes and subsidies, had to contribute to biodiversity and incentivize gender-responsive and socially and environmentally sustainable agricultural practices.

In times of crisis, such as the present pandemic, technological solutions, such as plans for fine-grained biodigital surveillance and the application of new biotechnologies or geoengineering, were accelerated and expanded with fresh investment and limited critique and oversight. The Convention had to continue to play a leading role in regulating such new and emerging technologies. The third objective of the Convention and its Nagoya Protocol ensured that, when biodiversity samples, including pathogens, were shared between countries and then used to generate profits, those countries providing the samples would receive some of the benefits that resulted. Many developing countries had freely shared useful samples of pathogens and genetic sequence information, which had been used to develop vaccines, diagnostic tools and other treatments. However, some developed countries had locked up vaccine production and secured more COVID-19 vaccine doses than they had citizens, while their biopharmaceutical firms reaped huge profits. As a result, many developing countries had been unable to secure sufficient diagnostic tools, vaccines and treatments for their citizens. Finally, it was hoped no further statements would be made about rhetorically positive actions that would be far overweighed by activities that were harmful to biodiversity. Effective options were available and needed to be implemented now.

*6. Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora*

The representative of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) said that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused immense human suffering and economic distress. It had also shown that the inseparable links between human and animal health, and the health of the planet, had been neglected. CITES had close to 50 years of experience with, and knowledge of, the international wildlife trade and could help contribute to building a more sustainable post-pandemic future. The international trade in specimens of CITES-listed species was one of the human-animal interfaces through which animals and animal products, and their pathogens, were introduced to new environments. International trade was also one of the interfaces through which CITES Parties might take measures to help reduce the risks of future pandemics.

CITES regulated international trade in over 38,000 species of wild animals and plants, and their products and derivatives, from all origins: wild, ranched, captive-bred or propagated. While the Convention regulated cross-border transactions, domestic regulation of harvest, markets and trade were also relevant, and public health and veterinary quarantine were areas where Parties might adopt stricter national measures in addition to those required by CITES. Existing CITES provisions and mechanisms, notably its strict system of permits, regulated the international trade in wildlife to ensure that it was legal, sustainable and traceable. That could provide a solid basis for Parties to consider additional CITES measures that could help mitigate the risks of diseases spreading and make the international trade in CITES-listed species safer.

She also highlighted the importance of partnerships, several of which had been formalized in CITES resolutions. Others existed through local operational agreements and she said that there was scope for reinforcing all of those partnerships in the context of One Health. In collaboration with such agencies as OIE and the International Air Transport Association, CITES helped to oversee aspects of international wildlife trade that specifically pertained to public and animal health. In collaboration with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and others, it supported electronic solutions for CITES permit management. The CITES Secretariat continued to participate in partnerships on forests and on sustainable wildlife management with other multilateral environmental agreements, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, and with other international organizations. Those partnerships helped support CITES Parties in designing and implementing multisectoral policies, legislation and research for better public health outcomes by indicating how and where better regulation of wildlife trade could be considered, and therefore played a role in the One Health approach.

*7. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*

The representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) said that there was an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen cross-sectoral collaboration through more inclusive One Health approaches that considered the upstream drivers of ecosystem health, including in the post‑2020 global biodiversity framework. FAO stood ready to work with the Convention on a range of biodiversity-health interlinkages for all sectors of food and agriculture. In its new strategic framework, FAO would work to support the achievements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and promote food systems that met its aspiration to leave no one behind with respect to sustainable, inclusive and resilient food systems for better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life.

To tackle the complex and interrelated issues associated with biodiversity loss, deforestation, and the emergence and spread of zoonotic diseases, FAO had intensified its work on One Health and had created a joint FAO/WHO Centre, in which OIE would be involved, to address zoonotic diseases, antimicrobial resistance and the food standards of the Codex Alimentarius. The FAO committees on agriculture and forestry had both requested FAO to comprehensively address the disease threats at the animal-human-environment interface in the implementation of its biodiversity mainstreaming strategy, and to strengthen the promotion of sustainable management of wildlife along the whole of the wild-meat value chain.

The FAO COVID-19 response and recovery programme in support of its members contained seven holistic priorities, including: One Health and preventing the next zoonotic pandemic, food systems, transformation and economic inclusion, employment and social protection during the green recovery. More specifically, the collaborative partnership on sustainable wildlife management, and the sustainable wildlife management programme, provided concrete guidance for reducing the future spillover of wildlife-borne disease to humans while promoting the sustainable use of wildlife. The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) was also assessing the current and potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the management of plant genetic resources.

In closing, she said that the post-2020 global biodiversity framework should consider setting a specific target on One Health and develop specific indicators under the currently proposed targets which were of relevance for interlinkages between biodiversity and health.

# V. Closing of the session

**A. Statement by the host of the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties**

The representative of the host for the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties thanked the Executive Secretary and the Chairs of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, technical and Technological Advice and the Subsidiary Body on Implementation for the organization of the session. He said that he had listened to the experiences and observations that had been shared during the deliberations and had noted the discussion on how to incorporate those lessons into the post-pandemic economic recovery plans. He observed that all Parties had undertaken fruitful work and active, and effective, measures to reverse the trends in global biodiversity loss and to reverse the risks of future pandemics. He hoped that momentum would be maintained and that extensive exchanges could take place, either formally or informally, on other topics with even greater participation by the Parties. Everyone, regardless of race, gender, age, background or identity, could contribute to the conservation of biodiversity, share its benefit and jointly promote the realization of the vision of a harmonious coexistence of humanity and nature. In closing he thanked the international community for its continued support to China in the organization of the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties and said that as the host country, China, would do its best to provide a safe, healthy and good conference environment. He wished all the participants good health and safety during the COVID-19 pandemic and expressed the hope of seeing them all in person in Kunming, China, during 2021.

**B. Closing statement by the Chair of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice**

The Chair of the Subsidiary Body thanked the participants for their many constructive and useful statements which had highlighted that it was important not only to address the COVID-19 pandemic but also to prevent similar pandemics in the future. They had also stressed that it was important to ensure the protection of biodiversity by putting in place the right policies, with cross-cutting collaboration and alliances with other institutions, for its conservation and sustainable use in the future. He thanked those that had participated in the virtual session and expressed the hope that he would see them all at a face-to-face meeting in the future.

**C. Closing statement by the Chair of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation**

The Chair of the Subsidiary Body expressed her sincere thanks to all the participants for their thoughtful and instructive contributions at the special virtual session. The session had been organized to maintain the momentum of the intergovernmental process, and she was confident that the session had successfully achieved that important goal. There had been a remarkable range of views and perspectives that had demonstrated the full range of biodiversity and health linkages at stake, from the global to the individual. She was pleased that so many speakers had highlighted the efforts to “build back better” and integrate biodiversity considerations into economic recovery plans and policies. The discussions had not only been interesting and lively, they had also been instructive and informative. She said that she had learned a great deal in a limited amount of time, and expressed the hope that all the participants had found the session equally enlightening.

**D. Closure**

After the customary exchange of courtesies, the Chair of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation declared the special virtual session closed at 9 a.m., Eastern Daylight Time, on Wednesday, 16 December 2020.

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