



**CONVENTION ON
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

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STATEMENT BY

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EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**

CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

TO

**FIFTH MEETING OF THE SUBSIDIARY BODY ON SCIENTIFIC,
TECHNICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADVICE**

Montreal, Canada, 31 January – 4 February 2000

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates and Observers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First, I would like to welcome you all to Montreal for this fifth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice.

I am also very pleased to welcome you personally, Mr. Chairman, to your first meeting of SBSTTA in that capacity. Your presence in the Chair bodes well for a successful meeting. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Professor Zakri, the outgoing Chairman for his invaluable contribution and support, which enhanced the development of the work undertaken by SBSTTA.

I hope that those of you who were here last week have had an opportunity to catch up on lost sleep, and that you are all eager to tackle the heavy workload that lies ahead. As the Chairman said, the adoption of a biosafety protocol here in Montreal two days ago is an important milestone for the Convention. Nairobi witnessed its conception in 1991. Cairo, Madrid, Aarhus, Montreal, Cartagena and Vienna witnessed its evolution and finally it was agreed upon in Montreal. On early Saturday morning, after the adoption of the protocol, one delegate asked who is the winner. The winner is Mother Earth and its inhabitants including all of us. You must all be proud of your achievements.

Mr. Chairman,

This fifth meeting of SBSTTA takes on special significance for the future of our Convention. You will have the opportunity - and the responsibility - to develop recommendations on basic concepts, which are key to the implementation of the Convention in the various programmatic areas. I refer, in particular, to the concepts of sustainable use and ecosystem approach, both of which are at a crucial stage in their elaboration.

As you know, sustainable use is one of the three fundamental objectives of the Convention itself. As for the ecosystem approach, it has been identified as the primary framework for action under the Convention by the Conference of the Parties. Both concepts are rooted in the premise that conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, and the sharing of benefits derived from its use, are matters of fundamental socio-economic importance. I believe that the actual application of these concepts will contribute greatly to the achievement of the Convention's objectives. While your main task at this meeting will be to further define the concepts, I invite you to look beyond and start reflecting on the ways and means of putting them into practice.

Mr. Chairman,

The complexity of biological diversity and its management was apparent at the Norway/UN Conference on the Ecosystem Approach for the Sustainable Use of Biological Diversity held in Trondheim last September. This meeting was instrumental in assembling views and sharpening our

thinking on the ecosystem approach. I encourage meetings of this kind as they provide an opportunity to exchange views on key issues, on a purely scientific and technical basis. They perform an important role in bridging the gap between science and policy-making.

This leads me to the important issues of peer review and scientific assessments under the Convention. You will recall that, at the previous meeting of SBSTTA, I was invited to prepare a detailed proposal on these issues for the consideration of the Conference of the Parties at its fifth meeting. Further to that request, and consistent with the recommendations of the Inter-sessional meeting on the Operations of the Convention, the Secretariat organized a brainstorming meeting on scientific assessments, which was hosted by the Government of Norway. Participants drew upon the experience of other Conventions and institutions, such as that of the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and those of the Montreal Protocol's Technical and Environmental Assessment Panel, which have been successful in providing credible scientific assessments to policy makers. They agreed that carefully planned and executed assessments are essential to the successful implementation of the Convention.

I draw your attention to the report of this meeting, which is available at the documentation desk. The report will provide food for thought as you examine the whole issue of how best to streamline ad hoc technical expert groups under the Convention.

Mr. Chairman,

I would now like to turn briefly to the thematic areas for this meeting. In accordance with relevant decisions by the Conference of the Parties, you are expected to develop a draft programme of work on agricultural biodiversity. In addition, building upon the consideration of status and trends at SBSTTA-4, you are to develop a draft programme of work on dryland biodiversity.

The word "biodiversity" generally invokes images of tropical rainforests or coral reefs teeming with life. Yet, drylands are no less significant given the high species-richness of some of the biomes they contain; the high level of biodiversity in specific areas; the global importance of particular sites - such as wetlands essential to migratory birds; and the fact that the most important domesticated food crops and livestock originated in these areas. The genetic diversity of these species, and of their wild relatives, is very important, particularly in developing varieties adapted to environmental extremes. Furthermore, the conservation and sustainable use of dryland biodiversity is central to poverty alleviation. Many developing countries have substantive areas of their potentially productive land located in drylands. Drylands represent about one third of the total land area of the world and is inhabited by almost one third of the world population estimated at roughly 5.8 billion in mid 1996. Drylands include many fragile ecosystems that may warrant priority attention to avoid irreversible loss of biological diversity, and consequent negative impacts on livelihoods.

However, one cannot address dryland biodiversity without reference to the Convention to Combat Desertification, which covers much of the same geographic areas. That is why the background documents submitted to your consideration by the Secretariat was prepared in close cooperation with the CCD Secretariat. I regard the elaboration of a programme of work on dryland biodiversity as a test of our resolve to take full advantage of potential synergies between the various environmental conventions. I invite you to ensure that the programme of work on dryland biodiversity is complementary to the programatic activities under the CCD. I also invite you to consider to what extent the two processes should be linked, institutionally or otherwise, based on the precedent of the programme of work on inland waters and the Convention on Wetlands.

I take this opportunity to emphasize that, in each of the thematic areas, the various organs of the Convention are working ever more closely with other conventions and international organizations, as called for by the Conference of the Parties. In addition to our cooperation with the Secretariat of the Convention to Combat Desertification, a new joint work plan has been developed with the Ramsar Convention, dealing with many aspects of our work on inland waters, marine and coastal biodiversity and other related areas. Likewise, the assessment providing the basis for your discussions on a programme of work on agricultural biodiversity was carried out jointly with FAO.

The results of your own discussions at SBSTTA-4 on sustainable use and tourism have been transmitted to the Commission on Sustainable Development. We also maintain close links with the secretariat of the

Intergovernmental Forum on Forests. As we move further into the operational phase, we look forward to increased collaborative efforts of these types.

Mr Chairman,

A number of events that have or will soon take place deserve a mention. The Panel of Experts on Access and Benefit Sharing met in Costa Rica, in October 1999. Thanks to Switzerland, Costa Rica and Norway who made this possible. The ad hoc open-ended inter-sessional working group on Article 8(j) and related provisions of the Convention will meet in Seville in March, at the kind invitation and support of Spain. Though these bodies report directly to the Conference of the Parties, I am sure that you will be interested in the results of their work.

Furthermore, at its recent session, the General Assembly adopted a resolution on the Convention, which supported the decisions of the last Conference of Parties and welcomed the ongoing inter-sessional work. It welcomed, in particular, your recommendation IV/5 on new technologies for the control of plant-gene expression.

Mr. Chairman,

Finally, I would like to make a few remarks about the organization of this meeting and the supporting documentation. You will recall that, at SBSTTA-4, a number of experts made presentations on matters under consideration, in order to bring the latest scientific developments directly to

SBSTTA. Since that initiative was well received, the SBSTTA Bureau agreed that I repeat the exercise and I have again invited experts to introduce some of the topics for in-depth discussion. I trust that these presentations will enrich the discussions on the main topics before you.

With respect to documentation, the Secretariat attempted to respond to your requests. A special effort was made to be as concise as possible and, on the advice of the Bureau, documents include an executive summary, suggested recommendations, as well as a table of contents for ease of reference. I hope that this new format will meet your expectations.

In preparing these documents, the Secretariat convened a number of “liaison groups”, composed of experts and institutions on the relevant topics. I have found this an extremely useful exercise, as it allows the Secretariat to draw on a very wide range of expertise that is simply not available in a small and over-stretched Secretariat. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the experts and organizations that participated in the liaison groups for their contribution to the preparation of the documents before you. I would also like to thank the Governments and organizations that provided facilities and financial support for the meetings. The contributions of France, UNEP, UNESCO and FAO were invaluable.

In order to meet the increasing demands placed on the Secretariat, the Division dealing with scientific, technical and technological matters was recently strengthened by filling the new posts for scientific assessment, the Global Taxonomy Initiative, and agricultural biodiversity. We are grateful to FAO for the latter post.

In addition, we have recently selected candidates for the posts dealing with access and benefit-sharing, and with economic matters, and we look forward to welcoming the individuals concerned in the Secretariat in the near future.

I wish to seize this opportunity to acknowledge and express my sincere appreciation to the parties that have provided financial assistance for the participation of developing countries and countries with economies in transition in this meeting: Canada, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Chairman,

It is with deep regret that I learned last night of the Kenya Airways plane crash in Côte d'Ivoire. My sincere sympathy goes to my African colleagues and to the families of the victims. May their souls rest in peace and may God give their family members solace.

Finally, I wish to convey to you my best wishes for a productive meeting. Jo Mulongoy, Principal Officer for Scientific, Technical and Technological Matters, is acting as Secretary of this meeting. I wish to

emphasize that he and all members of the Secretariat stand ready, as always, to assist you in your work in every possible way.

Thank you for your kind attention.