



STATEMENT BY

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

ON THE OCCASION OF

**THE CELEBRATIONS OF THE BEGINNING OF THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE
ON BIODIVERSITY IN SOUTH AMERICA**

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

The great Ecuadorian writer Juan Montalvo said “There is nothing harder than the softness of indifference.” (NO HAY NADA MÁS DURO QUE LA SUAVIDAD DE LA INDIFERENCIA)How right he was. Today, indifference continues to bedevil our attempts to solve the world’s most pressing problems – and nowhere more so than when it comes to biodiversity loss.

Sadly, far too many people across the world remain apathetic to the ongoing loss of life on Earth. The majority of the public and policymakers remain ignorant about the irreplaceable contributions that biodiversity makes to human wellbeing. As a result, biodiversity loss has not yet fully penetrated our collective consciousness.

Following the historic success of the Nagoya Biodiversity Summit last October, the UN General Assembly declared 2011-2020 the UN Decade on Biodiversity. The Decade is a vehicle to support the implementation of the 2011-2020 Strategic Plan for Biodiversity and the achievement of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. At the brink of ecological disaster, it is a means to highlight everything we stand to lose by doing nothing. It is also a worldwide celebration of everything we stand to gain by changing our ways.

Over the course of the Decade, biodiversity must be mainstreamed throughout government and all sectors of society through communication, education and awareness-raising, appropriate incentive measures, and institutional change. By 2020, citizens and governments without exception should be firmly committed to the preservation of our biological heritage.

With this in mind, I would like to thank the Government of Ecuador and in particular Foreign Minister Ricardo Patiño and Environment Minister Marcela Aguiñaga for organizing and hosting this event to celebrate the beginning of the Decade in South America. Ecuador is a perfect venue for this celebration: one of world’s megadiverse countries, it is home to some of world’s most important biodiversity hot spots including the tropical andes (the most diverse region on earth) the endangered Chocó and the iconic Galapagos Islands, as well as the Amazon forest. It has an impressive number of species, including 21,000 plant, 402 amphibian, 407 reptile, 706 fish, 1,559 bird and 324 mammal. Ecuador is also proud of its cultural diversity and of the traditional knowledge and experience of its many indigenous and local communities that is so important in managing and protecting this natural wealth.

This richness is shared by South America as a whole, which contains more than 40 per cent of the Earth’s biodiversity and more than one-quarter of its forests. Allow me therefore to ask South American countries to lead the way in the achievement of the Aichi Targets. As you know, over the course of the Decade Parties are being asked to develop, implement and communicate the results of time-bound national strategies for implementing the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity, including interim milestones and reporting mechanisms on progress achieved.

The participation of the participants from all countries of this region, in this week’s capacity-building workshop to update national biodiversity strategies and action plans in line with the new Strategic Plan, is an important first step in the right direction. With Rio+20 less than a year away and COP-11 in Hyderabad coming shortly thereafter, there are many other steps that must be taken. We must take advantage of this opening period of the Decade to move beyond

good intentions and produce concrete results in the form of updated NBSAPs that can mainstream biodiversity across government, society and the economy.

As you know, what we do – or fail to do – during these next ten years will determine the status of life on Earth for generations to come. But more immediately, what we do during these next two years will likely determine – for good or for bad – how the rest of the decade will unfold.

Thank you for your kind attention.