



REMARKS

by

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

at the

**SPECIAL EVENING EVENT WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF
SCHOOL AND COLLEGE STUDENTS**

on the occasion of the

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

22 May 2012

Marina Beach, Chennai, India

It is an honour to be here with all of you here today. The International Day for Biological Diversity is a very special occasion to reflect on the importance of biodiversity to human well-being and for all life on Earth. This year, the theme of the day urges us to reflect on the special role of marine and coastal biodiversity in our lives.

Oceans cover almost three quarters of the surface area of the globe. From their shores to their darkest depths, oceans and coasts support a rich tapestry of life on which human communities rely. Fisheries provide more than 15 per cent of the global dietary intake of animal protein. Oceans and coastal areas provide invaluable ecosystem services – from tourism to protection from storms. Minuscule photosynthesizing plants called phytoplankton provide 50 per cent of all the oxygen on Earth. Protection and sustainable use of marine ecosystems is crucial to human well-being.

Yet, despite its importance, marine biodiversity is being severely degraded by human activities. Commercial over-exploitation of the world's fish stocks is severe. Many species have been hunted to fractions of their original populations. About a third of critical marine environments – such as seagrasses, mangroves and coral reefs – are estimated to have been destroyed. Plastic debris continues to kill marine life, and pollution from land is creating areas of coastal waters that are almost devoid of oxygen. Increased burning of fossil fuels is affecting the global climate, making the sea surface warmer, causing sea level to rise and increasing ocean acidity, with consequences we are only beginning to comprehend.

So now, more than ever, we need to strengthen our actions to safeguard biodiversity and enable sustainable development. Young people have a very important part in these efforts. Already young people are taking action, for example planting trees, lobbying governments, recycling waste and raising awareness about pollution. And we need to support them in this. Not only can children and youth take action for biodiversity and contribute to maintaining clean air, water and fertile soils that can feed us all, but studies show that children and youth who are in regular contact with nature are healthier, more focused and disciplined, that their sensitivity, reasoning and observational skills are sharper and their imagination is more stimulated.

As an example of this positive approach for real impact, I have been very impressed by the *Paryavaran Mitra* project in India that aims to mobilize 20 million Friends of the Environment in 200,000 schools across India. It is an action-based project that measures participants' "Hand Prints" as a measure of positive environmental action—action that is directed to decrease the human footprint—that will have an impact on environment, society and economy. A *Paryavaran Mitra* is a child, a teacher, or any individual who has taken steps from awareness to positive action, and who reflects this commitment in every aspect of life. It is someone who takes up a leadership role, and assumes responsibility to promote and initiate cooperative action in his/her spheres of influence. This is an excellent model that could serve as an example in other countries – and I applaud all the young people actively involved in this.

Another project, *The Green Wave* initiative, is part of the global efforts under the Convention to raise awareness and encourage the involvement of children and youth in action for biodiversity. It is a global campaign to encourage students to learn about biodiversity, to work with members of the community, and to benefit from their contact with nature. Each year as a special global event on the International Day for Biological Diversity, participants join together to plant a tree at 10 a.m. local time, creating a "green wave" starting in the Far East and travelling west around the world. Throughout the day, students upload photos and stories to *The Green Wave* website to share with other participants. Over 3,500 groups involving tens of thousands of

children and youth from over 70 countries have participated in since 2008. I hope that Indian schools and colleges can get involved and urge you all to take a look at this with a view to participating throughout the United Nations Decade of Biodiversity 2011 to 2020.

I look forward to working with the Government of India, Indian institutions, such as the Centre for Environment Education, non-governmental organizations, and individuals – not least children and youth – in helping to strengthen these initiatives for positive action.

I would like to thank my hosts for the excellent series of events throughout the day, and all of you for being here and for your commitment to biodiversity. Let me conclude with a call for continued action in support of biodiversity, not only on the International Day for Biodiversity, but every day. “Nature protects if she is protected”: that is the slogan of the forthcoming global meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity taking place in Hyderabad later this year. Nature has done her part in protecting us. Now, let us do our part.
