



**STATEMENT
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at the

RBS 'EARTH HEROES' AWARD 2012

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**Convention on
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Excellency, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Royal Bank of Scotland and the Bombay Natural History Society for presenting this award that bears the evocative and hopeful name of “Earth Heroes Awards” to eight of India’s most dedicated environmental champions. It is an honor to be here to celebrate the work of eight pioneers who address today’s environmental and economical challenges with exceptional creativity and optimism.

Their passion for wildlife and conservation are truly inspirational at a time when an estimated 34,000 plants and 5,200 animal species - including one in eight of the world's bird species- as well as about 30% of breeds of the main farm animal species are at risk of extinction, when about 45 per cent of the Earth's original forests are gone and up to 10 per cent of coral reefs have been destroyed.

The fact that biodiversity is declining at an unprecedented rate does not necessarily reflect a general lack of willingness to act and do something to preserve life on Earth; those who know about biodiversity almost spontaneously want to act to preserve it. This is why the first target of the Strategic Plan on Biodiversity 2011-2020 is to ensure that by 2020 at the latest, the world's citizens know about the value of biodiversity and ways to protect it.

The fact that biodiversity continues to decline reflects the fact that we do not sufficiently pay attention to the impacts of our production and consumption activities on biodiversity. We do not appreciate the importance of the values and benefits, sometimes indirect and not instantaneous, that biodiversity brings. It also reflects the fact that other activities often take precedence and distract us from caring for the planet, the only planet we have.

One of the main challenges that we face in order to reduce biodiversity loss and reach the Aichi Biodiversity Targets is to convince all stakeholders, including local communities and businesses, that preventing biodiversity loss is an essential step to maintain or improve human well-being. We have before us individuals and institutions who developed approaches to biodiversity conservation that integrate human values and consider the importance of human well-being and sustainable

livelihoods. 'We must think about the human being behind biodiversity' said Profesor Swaminathan.

The experiences of “RBS Earth Heroes” demonstrate that actions aimed at reducing or halting the loss of biodiversity can be truly rewarding. Their stories can inspire all of us, and resonate throughout the world. This award provides an opportunity to build on the experiences and best practices of individuals and institutions and to carry their messages across all sectors and segments of society. We need to give a stronger recognition of and support for such community-based approaches to pursuing the human benefits of biodiversity conservation, including food security and poverty alleviation. While we are aware of the critical role of local communities in sustainable management of natural resources, we often tend to take their efforts for granted. I believe that we need to acknowledge this important contribution to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and I am also convinced that there is a lot that we can learn from their approaches.

During the course of the United Nations Decade on Biological Diversity, we are invited to step up efforts to further integrate the concept of biodiversity in our policies and measures, in private sector decision-making processes and in education programs. And we are invited to raise public awareness on the links between biodiversity and well-being, and on the interdependencies that exist among all living species. We have a collective responsibility, as called for in the 1992 Rio Declaration, to promote harmony with nature and the Earth to achieve a balance among the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations.

Tomorrow will begin the second week of the eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 11) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). I wish to thank once again our hosts, the Government of India, the authorities of Andhra Pradesh and the City of Hyderabad, for their warm welcome. The facilities, services and location of the Hyderabad International Congress Centre have allowed CBD delegates to focus on the CBD deliberations and to moving the COP 11 agenda forward. The issues of integration of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets at the national level are at the forefront of the negotiations, as well as the need for improved cooperation and partnerships, including with the private sector, in order to alleviate poverty and reduce biodiversity loss.

I take this opportunity to reiterate my invitation to all stakeholders to select one or more of the Aichi Targets and to become a local, regional, national or global champion for its achievement.

Again, congratulations to all “RBS Earth Heroes”.

Thank you.