



STATEMENT BY

MR. BRAULIO F. DE SOUZA DIAS

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

to the

**GROUP ON EARTH OBSERVATIONS BIODIVERSITY OBSERVATION NETWORK
(GEO BON) ALL-HANDS MEETING**

Asilomar, California

3 December 2012



**Convention on
Biological Diversity**

Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity
United Nations Environment Programme
413 Saint-Jacques Street, Suite 800, Montreal, QC, H2Y 1N9, Canada
Tel : +1 514 288 2220 Fax : +1 514 288 6588
secretariat@cbd.int www.cbd.int



Dear colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 provides a common framework for political action towards the three objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity, conservation, sustainable use and access and benefit-sharing. Parties to the Convention are in the process of setting national targets on the basis of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and are developing monitoring systems to track progress towards the achievement of these targets.

The adoption of the Strategic Plan was a great achievement as it lays out a common vision and way forward. However it also creates several scientific challenges related to its implementation. There are gaps in underlying data and our understanding of ecosystems and how they change as a consequence of stressors is limited. There is a need for more and better models to analyze and predict change and deal with uncertainty and there is a need for better tools to communicate the science and make it useful for policy analysis and policy development. GEO-BON is uniquely placed to help the biodiversity community overcome these challenges.

Biodiversity observations, as the basis of indicators and monitoring systems, are the key currency for any attempt to review progress in implementing the Strategic Plan, be it at the global, regional, national or sub-national levels. Sound indicator and monitoring systems will be crucial over this decade in tracking progress towards our attainment of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and in providing us with feedback about what types of actions are bringing us closer or further away from meeting our goals. Your challenge in GEO BON is to ensure that we make the right observations in adequate temporal and spatial resolution, that these observations are pursued into the future to ensure continuous monitoring, that data are archived and can be analysed across data sets and that models and tools exist that feed into indicators and other policy support mechanisms. This is no small task.

As you embark on your all-hands meeting this week allow me to make a few observations which you may wish to consider in your work over the coming days:

Firstly, I think we need to strengthen the links between the biodiversity and the Earth observations communities. Many representatives of ministries for the environment are not familiar with the Group on Earth Observations and the implementation plan of the Global Earth Observation System of Systems. On the other hand, in most countries, there is no clear mechanism by which the needs of the environment community are conveyed to ministries for science and technology. As a consequence research funding to address these needs is often overlooked.

Secondly there is also a need to overcome the divide between the GEO Societal Benefit Areas and to more effectively collaborate with and draw on those Societal Benefit Areas which do not address biodiversity and ecosystems directly. I had the opportunity to discuss this with the Director of GEO, Barbara Ryan, who voiced similar concerns. I would therefore invite you to consider in your work whether there are data sets and approaches from other SBAs that you might draw on and I would encourage you to consider those areas of your work which may be relevant to other groups.

Thirdly, and linked to the previous two points, I suggest that you consider drawing on successful schemes that combine remotely sensed data with ground-based information, such as the one developed for the Amazon forest monitoring and surveillance which is already being

replicated in some other tropical forest countries or the work carried out under the Observatory for the Forests of Central Africa, OFAC. Many people find it difficult to understand that with all the technology we have we still cannot say very much about change in extent and quality of ecosystems over time using remote sensing information, except perhaps for forests. By working with space agencies GEO-BON could help to identify the types, location and frequency of observations that are needed as well as which combinations of sensors would be most helpful to have in the future to ensure that we are better able to make use of remote sensing technology. In addition linking with such efforts, such as the Global Wetlands Observation System for example, would seem to be a high priority as it would not only fill a significant gap but would also provide greater visibility to GEO BON.

Lastly, I believe that it is vital that you demonstrate that your work is of direct relevance to countries and that it responds to their needs. Where products already exist, you may wish to consider ways to more effectively highlight and communicate them and promote their application to national authorities. If GEO BON continues to be viewed, as it is by many, as being primarily associated with academic and conceptual work it will be difficult to convey its relevance to decision makers. On the other hand, if you can show that your work makes a direct contribution to countries' efforts in monitoring biodiversity change and in understanding the consequences of their policy decisions, you are more likely to find that GEO-BON is seen as relevant to national processes and as responding to donor priorities. This idea has been behind the Initiative to Enhance Global Biodiversity Observations for Monitoring Progress Towards the Aichi Biodiversity Targets which was made available as an information document at COP-11 in Hyderabad. I understand that this Initiative has not yet been fully discussed within GEO BON and hope that this meeting may offer an opportunity to do so as well as to take into account the outcomes of the GEO-IX Plenary Session which just concluded in Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil.

I am pleased to see the formal association between GEO BON and the Biodiversity Indicators Partnership. This is an important step in more closely aligning the work of the biodiversity observation and indicator communities. I encourage you to nurture this so that GEO BON and the BIP can be fully complementary and together take a key role in monitoring progress in the achievement of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets during this UN Decade on Biodiversity.

With this I would like to ensure of you my full support to the work of GEO-Bon and I wish you all a very productive and successful meeting.

Thank you.