



STATEMENT BY

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EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

To the

**OPENING SESSION OF THE SEVENTEENTH MEETING OF THE
SUBSIDIARY BODY ON SCIENTIFIC, TECHNICAL AND
TECHNOLOGICAL ADVICE (SBSTTA-17)**

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**Convention on
Biological Diversity**

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Mister Chairman,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the seventeenth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical, and Technological Advice. Many of you have been involved in the discussions on Article 8(j) and related provisions last week and various events over a busy weekend, including an Expert Workshop on enhancing biodiversity data and observing systems in support of the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, an Advisory Group meeting for the preparation of GBO-4 and regional consultations. Nevertheless, I hope you had a bit of time to relax. And for those who have just arrived, welcome to Montreal.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Governments of Denmark, Finland, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, Norway and Spain for their financial contributions to enable the participation in this meeting of developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

As you have highlighted, Mr. Chairman, we expect that this meeting of SBSTTA will be quite different from those we have grown accustomed to. The changes that you and your colleagues in the SBSTTA Bureau have brought to this particular meeting reflect the COP decisions and the mission of SBSTTA to provide Parties and stakeholders with advice on approaches and mechanisms to overcome the challenges that are reflected in the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its Aichi Biodiversity Targets and the corresponding updated NBSAPs and associated national biodiversity targets.

I have repeatedly called upon Parties and partners to focus the attention of this body on exchanging experiences, learning from each other and finding ways to use the capacities and strengths of some to support those with particular needs. I have also expressed my view that the decisions we have negotiated over the past two decades provide a sufficient basis for us to move forward collectively and individually. Therefore, I would like to urge you to use this meeting as an opportunity to demonstrate that SBSTTA is primarily a scientific and technical body -- not just a body to prepare decisions for the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties, but, in line with its mandate in Article 25 of the Convention, one that can respond to the challenge of identifying the scientific and technical needs relating to the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity, that can assess the effectiveness of actions taken in accordance with the Convention, and that can provide concrete advice on how these scientific and technical challenges might be addressed.

That is why for this meeting of SBSTTA, unlike in the past, the Secretariat has refrained from preparing draft recommendations to the Conference of the Parties. Many of the scientific and technical findings of the Subsidiary Body can be agreed as SBSTTA conclusions, not necessarily SBSTTA recommendations for future decisions of the Conference of the Parties and, of course, nothing prevents Parties from building on SBSTTA

conclusions in their recommendations to the Conference of the Parties at the next meeting of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Review of Implementation of the Convention next June. I also hope the explanatory note that we issued last month has proven useful to all participants in this meeting to clarify the way forward.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Three years have passed since the adoption of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 -- three years that have been challenging for many countries and for the global community at large. Three years during which socio-economic considerations have dominated the discourse and during which budgets for environmental action have continued to shrink. Three years which triggered old reflexes of unilateralism, unfettered natural resource exploitation and lingering climate-change denial. Clearly, the biodiversity community is facing significant challenges.

But let me also remind you: within those three years, we have seen most Parties actively embarking on the updating of their national biodiversity strategies and action plans or NBSAPs, and the establishment of national targets, with 21 updated NBSAPs having been submitted since the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties and just over 130 eligible Parties having started to receive support from the Financial Mechanism of the Convention, the Global Environment Facility, through the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) or direct access – though it is true that updating NBSAPs has proceeded more slowly than the Conference of the Parties envisaged at its tenth meeting.

It is also three years during which 92 Parties have signed and 25 Parties have already ratified the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefit Arising from their Utilization, with a likelihood that the Protocol will be in force in time to hold the first meeting of the Parties to the Protocol concurrently with the twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, in October 2014 in the Republic of Korea.

Three years during which we have seen the emergence of a new body, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). Three years which saw the establishment of the target to double the total biodiversity-related international financial resource flows to developing countries, at the eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties, and during which further work on the resource mobilization strategy was undertaken. And three years during which the Secretariat, in collaboration with partners, has held over 60 capacity-building workshops on scientific and technical matters - not counting technical expert meetings - and focused much of its resources to supporting Parties' efforts in implementation.

Last August, I issued a notification to all Parties reminding them of what is expected from the updated NBSAPs based on decisions of the Conference of the Parties. This week, I shall issue a complementary notification bringing to the attention of Parties the opportunities and existing guidance for promoting synergy with the other biodiversity-related conventions and also encouraging Parties to pay attention in updating their NBSAPs to the commitments under the Biosafety Strategic Plan for this decade of the Cartagena Protocol, as well as to the agreed revised targets under the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation and the national action plans for protected areas submitted by 107 countries last year.

Recognizing the challenges that remain, last April I restructured the Secretariat so that it could better respond to the needs of Parties and the issues addressed in the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity. Among other changes I created a new unit on Mainstreaming, Partnerships and Outreach (MPO) and changed the name of our science unit to Science, Assessment and Monitoring (SAM).

Beyond activities under the Convention itself, we recognize the growing number of countries that work on incorporating the values of biodiversity and ecosystem services into their national accounts – and also the growing number of initiatives to promote research and practical testing of approaches in mainstreaming biodiversity in public policies, plans and programmes, including subnational and local governments, and in the policies and practices of the private sector.

In the ongoing discussions on sustainable development goals and the post-2015 development agenda, we note that many actors emphasize the importance of mainstreaming biodiversity and acknowledge biodiversity as vital for, and underpinning, sustainable development. Several key actors have also been strongly promoting an integrated approach to the sustainable development goals – highlighting the values of biodiversity to promote goals related to food security, access to water, health, sustainable energy, poverty eradication, equity and human well-being. Others have been proposing an integrated approach at the landscape level, to bring together different sectors and stakeholders to plan and manage more sustainable and resilient landscapes and seascapes for delivery of goods and other ecosystem services. Personally, I consider these as very positive developments.

At the same time, I also think that we have to do better and that we can do better. How often do we hide behind a perceived lack of knowledge, lack of data, lack of baselines and of monitoring information? Yes, access to credible data is a challenge everywhere. But have we really done enough to mobilize data that is available, but hidden in various institutions; or for which only partial or aggregated published information is accessible, when raw data is needed for additional analysis and modelling? Have we really consulted the best scientists and holders of knowledge in all the regions to seek their advice and get their assessments? Are we really collaborating with organizations and networks that maintain regional and global databases, and contributing systematically to these databases? And are we really investing in efforts to link our national datasets with those from other countries?

Last year, the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) convened a landmark conference on bioinformatics. Last week, GBIF launched the first Global Bioinformatics Outlook report proposing to enhance access to biodiversity data from different sources, such as collections, literature, remote sensing, DNA sequencing and field surveys, among other sources. I would like to suggest that we transform this into a framework for a continuous partnership or initiative to help the implementation of Aichi Target 19 and benefiting implementation of all the other targets.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I see a lot of opportunities for us to advance, from a scientific and technical perspective, our ability to monitor biodiversity, understand change and support policy-making to plan for and support positive outcomes in accordance with the objectives of the Convention and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. In Article 18 of the Convention, Parties committed to effective scientific, technical and technological cooperation among each other. I consider this as a key mechanism to overcome challenges that persist. In this context, I wish to remind ourselves of the many willing and able institutions that support implementation of the Convention in their countries and beyond, including the members of the Consortium of Scientific Partners for Biodiversity, those engaged in South-South cooperation, the Global Partnership for Plant Conservation, the Global Invasive Alien Species Information Network, the Biodiversity Indicators Partnership, the Biodiversity Observation Network of the Group on Earth Observation, the initiative of the Global Biodiversity Informatics Outlook and the Biodiversity Champions campaign, to name but a few.

I hope that in your discussions this week you will develop a very concrete list of the scientific and technical challenges you face and the options and possible mechanisms by which these can be addressed. I am convinced that by the end of this week we will have realized the wealth of tools, guidance and scientific information that are available to us to move forward in implementing the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and each Aichi Biodiversity Target.

As you know, one of the functions of SBSTTA, as determined in Article 25 of the Convention, is “to assess the effects of the types of measures taken in accordance with the provisions of the Convention”. We know that SBSTTA has not done a particularly good job at this. I hope, therefore, that by the end of this week, we have at least begun to enable SBSTTA to carry out this important function.

By the end of the week, I trust that we will also have identified which enabling conditions, mechanisms and processes may need to be put in place, at national, regional and global levels, to fill remaining gaps and advance the achievement of each Aichi Target and facilitate implementation of corresponding national targets. I also hope that we’ll have a better understanding of how to assess the effects of the types of measures taken by Parties to implement their commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity. All this may result in messages to the scientific community and science funding bodies as well as to the

Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) but also, and perhaps in particular, in guidance to the Parties themselves. The outcomes of this SBSTTA meeting will certainly contribute to the assessment to be made at the twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties and to a potential decision on a roadmap for 2020.

I look forward to interesting scientific and technical discussions during the coming days.

Thank you.
