



**STATEMENT BY
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ON THE OCCASION OF THE

**INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON CONSERVATION OF POLAR BEARS AND JUBILEE
MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE 1973 AGREEMENT ON THE CONSERVATION OF
POLAR BEARS**

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**Convention on
Biological Diversity**

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Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning to all and thank you very much to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation for organizing the International Forum on Conservation of Polar Bears and for inviting me to convey a few words from the perspective of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

I would like to highlight Russia's support for the Convention on Biological Diversity, especially its hosting of a recent workshop here in Moscow on the description of ecologically or biologically significant marine areas in the North Pacific.

The biodiversity of the Arctic, including its most charismatic species, the polar bear, is reflected in many aspects of work of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

At the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention in 2010, its 193 Parties adopted the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and committed themselves to achieving its 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets. Many of these targets are directly relevant to the species we are here to discuss, such as Target 12, which aims squarely to prevent the extinction of threatened species by 2020. However, many other targets and related activities of the SCBD are also relevant to the conservation of polar bears and other Arctic species. Allow me to draw your attention to targets 10, 11 and 18.

Target 10

Aichi Target 10 addresses the need to minimize the pressures exerted on ecosystems impacted by climate change and ocean acidification. Indeed, climate change is by far the most serious threat to Arctic biodiversity. The thickness and extent of Arctic summer sea ice cover is decreasing at an accelerating rate. The years since 2007 have seen less summer sea ice than any previous year on record—in fact, the Arctic ocean is expected to become ice-free in summer within a few decades. Sea ice is critical for polar bears, which use it as a platform for seal hunting, who in turn also depend on specific ice conditions for reproduction. Polar bear populations can be expected to suffer profoundly from decreasing sea ice cover.

Parties to the CBD have made many commitments with regard to biodiversity and climate change, such as identifying vulnerable ecosystems within their countries. They have been encouraged to consider introducing necessary measures for mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change. In 2008, the CBD formed its second Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Biodiversity and Climate Change and Biodiversity, which recognized the particular vulnerability of Arctic species, due to restricted distribution and low density.

In the same year, an international expert meeting held in Finland identified a number of specific activities to help Parties meet their obligations concerning biodiversity, climate change, and indigenous and local communities in the Arctic. Such activities include processes and legislation to link local knowledge and activities in the Arctic region to national level planning exercises. The meeting also recognized the need for international cooperation in linking biodiversity and climate change adaptation in the Arctic region both in terms of sharing knowledge and information and with regards to the management of transboundary species and livelihoods.

The Secretariat of the CBD has had a Memorandum of Cooperation with the working group of the Arctic Council on the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) since 2009. This Memorandum contributes to building and sharing knowledge

and in creating awareness about the state of Arctic biodiversity. While CAFF is helping to inform the Parties to the Convention on the status and trends of Arctic biodiversity, the Secretariat of the CBD helps to place the issue within a global framework.

Target 10 also addresses the separate but related process of ocean acidification. Since CO₂ is more soluble in cold water than in warm, the surface waters of Polar oceans will be hit hardest and earliest: they are projected to become under-saturated with carbonate minerals by the middle of this century. How this change will play out within the Arctic food web is not yet entirely clear—nor is its impact on polar bears, a highly specialized top predator.

Ocean acidification is an important issue that is being considered under the Convention's programme of work on marine and coastal biodiversity. The CBD organized an expert meeting on the subject in 2011 and is currently finalizing its second scientific synthesis document, to be submitted to SBSTTA 18 in June of next year. It will provide a synthesis of the biodiversity implications of ocean acidification for marine and coastal systems.

Target 11

As polar bears are essentially marine mammals, target 11 is particularly relevant, as it affirms the commitment of Parties to conserve, by 2020, at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, through marine protected areas. Although increasing, global ocean coverage by MPAs remains low at only 2.2 %; they are particularly scarce in the Arctic.

In connection with this target, in February of this year, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation hosted the North Pacific Regional Workshop to Facilitate the Description of Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas, known as "EBSAs". The EBSA process is, in essence, a global scientific and technical process for describing the "special places" in the ocean, through the application of a set of seven scientific criteria set out in annex I of COP decision IX/20.

At this workshop, one of six regional EBSA workshops thus far convened by the CBD Secretariat, 20 such "special places" were described. A total of 172 have been described over 75% of the world's ocean.

The next EBSA workshop will focus on the Arctic region, and will therefore be directly relevant to the polar bear. Scheduled for early March of 2014 in Helsinki, Finland, it can be expected to result in descriptions of places that are particularly special for the polar bear—places that may require enhanced conservation and management measures, including the creation of marine protected areas.

Target 18

The Convention recognizes in its preamble the close dependence of indigenous and local communities on biological diversity, and in articles 8(j) and 10(c) and related provisions, the importance of traditional knowledge and customary sustainable use of biological resources for ecosystem health and management. Target 18 calls for this traditional knowledge and customary use to be respected and fully integrated and reflected in the implementation of the Convention.

The Convention has made significant progress in recognising the practical application of the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities, as well as how traditional knowledge and science may interface to provide the best possible knowledge base for local ecosystem management, including the conservation and management of polar bears, or

“nanuk” in Inuktitut. The recently established Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) is also working closely with the CBD to consider how traditional knowledge may be taken into account along with science in global assessments.

In this context, I would like to refer to the draft Plan of Action on Customary Sustainable Use of Biological Diversity agreed in Recommendation 8/2 of the eighth meeting of the Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions of the CBD this last October.

A good example of this is the co-management system used over much of polar bear habitat in Canada, which takes into account both Western science and local knowledge, with the goal of ensuring that customary use is sustainable.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let us imagine a world that by 2020 has achieved a sustainable balance, where different knowledge systems are viewed as generating equally valid evidence, using different criteria for validating data and information for managing ecosystems and their diverse species, including such charismatic species as the polar bear. Not only will a best knowledge system assist in meeting requirements under the 1973 Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears, but will also help to achieve the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

Finally, let me take this moment to extend again my wholehearted appreciation to the Government of the Russian Federation for organizing this important congress. Widely considered one of the most successful international agreements for managing natural resources, this treaty is making an important contribution to the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the achievement of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

I look forward to the discussions and concrete and practical outcomes of this forum.

Thank you for your attention.