



STATEMENT BY

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EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

at the opening of

**ARCTIC REGIONAL WORKSHOP TO FACILITATE THE DESCRIPTION OF
ECOLOGICALLY OR BIOLOGICALLY SIGNIFICANT MARINE AREAS**

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**Convention on
Biological Diversity**

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Excellency, Minister Niinistö,

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to extend my warmest welcome and utmost thanks to all the experts from countries and organizations for participating in the Arctic regional workshop on ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs), the seventh regional workshop on EBSAs being convened by the CBD Secretariat.

My sincere thanks go to the Government of Finland for hosting this important workshop and for their kind financial support, which enabled the convening of this regional workshop and the participation of experts from the region. We greatly appreciate their warm welcome and kind hospitality in this historic city of Helsinki.

I would like to also thank the Secretariat of the Arctic Council Working Group on Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) for their excellent cooperation and contribution to the scientific and technical preparation for this workshop. In particular, we greatly appreciate that CAFF Secretariat has kindly coordinated the scientific inputs from other relevant Working Groups of the Arctic Council.

The Arctic hosts a wide range of unique and diverse marine life that has long captivated the hearts and minds of people all over the world. Marine biodiversity in the Arctic is critical to the health and well-being of Arctic nations and coastal communities, especially indigenous communities, and also contributes to the healthy functioning of the world's oceans.

In my recent statement at the eighth meeting of the United Nations Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, I stressed the importance of oceans to sustainable development and healthy global ecosystems. It is no exaggeration to say all of humanity depends on marine biodiversity. Marine ecosystems are essential for the bio-geo-chemical cycles that sustain all life on earth. Moreover, hundreds of millions of people rely directly on marine biodiversity for their livelihoods. And nowhere is the link between healthy marine ecosystems and resilient coastal communities more essential than in the Arctic.

The conservation and sustainable use of Arctic biodiversity is essential to the achievement of the goals of the Convention and is reflected in many aspects of the work of the CBD. In December 2013, I spoke at the International Forum on Conservation of Polar Bears, where I outlined the importance of Arctic biodiversity to a number of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, including Targets 10, 11, 12, and 18. Respectively, these targets address the mitigation of the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification on ecosystems, prevention of the extinction of threatened species, the importance of area-based measures in conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and the value of traditional knowledge and customary sustainable use of biodiversity in supporting healthy ecosystems.

The CBD Secretariat has had a Resolution of Cooperation with the working group of the Arctic Council on the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) since 2009. This Resolution contributes to the building and sharing of knowledge about the state of Arctic biodiversity and supports the implementation of the CBD in the Arctic region.

As communities around the world strive to achieve sustainable development, they face multiple challenges due to unprecedented biodiversity loss arising from overfishing, habitat destruction, and emerging threats of global-scale climate change, among others. The oceans have been a global repository of the wastes produced by various human activities, causing, for example, an increase in the occurrence of oxygen-depleted dead zones in coastal areas around the world. Concerns are being raised that the oceans

are quickly reaching an ecological tipping point beyond which the negative impacts from these threats may become irreversible, with deleterious implications for the planet and all of its inhabitants.

If we neglect marine biodiversity and permit its continued decline, we will undermine the goals of poverty eradication, food security, human health and adaptation to climate change – all vital for the well-being of us all, but especially for the poorest of this world.

In various fora, including the Rio+20 Conference, global leaders have recognized that oceans, seas and coastal areas form an integrated and essential component of the Earth system and are critical to sustaining it. They have stressed the importance of conserving and sustainably utilizing the oceans and seas, while at the same time protecting biodiversity and the marine environment and addressing the impacts of climate change. They have committed to protect and restore the health, productivity and resilience of oceans and marine ecosystems, and to maintain their biodiversity, enabling their conservation and sustainable use for present and future generations. And they have agreed to effectively apply the ecosystem approach and the precautionary approach in the management of activities that have an impact on the marine environment, so as to deliver on all three dimensions of sustainable development.

Likewise, world leaders have reaffirmed the importance of area-based conservation measures, including marine protected areas, as a tool for the conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of its components. This is embodied in Aichi Biodiversity Target 11, which states that by 2020, 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are to be conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures.

But in order to effectively protect and preserve marine biodiversity, we have first to know where to take action. It is in this respect that the ecologically or biologically significant marine areas play a key role. Through an inclusive and science-driven process, the regional EBSA workshops have sought to describe the areas of the oceans that are crucial to the healthy functioning of the global marine ecosystem.

In decision X/29 on marine and coastal biodiversity, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity noted that the application of the scientific criteria for the EBSAs presents a tool that Parties and competent intergovernmental organizations may choose to use to progress towards the implementation of ecosystem approaches in marine areas both within and beyond national jurisdiction.

Parties also noted that the application of the EBSA criteria is a scientific and technical exercise, that areas found to meet the criteria may require enhanced conservation and management measures, and that this can be achieved through a variety of means, including marine protected areas and impact assessments. Parties emphasized that the identification of EBSAs and the selection of conservation and management measures is a matter for States and competent intergovernmental organizations.

Upon the request of the Conference of the Parties at its tenth meeting in 2010, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity has been convening a series of regional workshops to facilitate the description of EBSAs. The results of these workshops in the Western South Pacific region and the Wider Caribbean and Western Mid-Atlantic region were considered at the eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties. COP-11 then requested the Executive Secretary to submit the summary report of these results to the United Nations General Assembly and its relevant processes. Similarly, the results of the present workshop will also be submitted to a forthcoming meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice prior to the twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

The EBSA process undertaken since the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in partnership with various global and regional partners has facilitated the sharing of scientific information and data, networking of experts across disciplines at regional scale, and enhanced collaboration between

various regional initiatives for marine conservation and sustainable use by providing a regional platform for a scientific assessment of the ecological or biological significance of marine areas.

Sustainable oceans can be achieved only through the building of a shared vision and strong commitments toward conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity. Combined with innovative approaches for linking science with policy development and implementation through multi-stakeholder partnerships, these efforts should ensure a sustainable future for the oceans of the world.

With this, I wish you a successful and fruitful workshop.

Thank you for your attention.