



STATEMENT BY

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CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

at the opening of

**NORTH-WEST ATLANTIC 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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Distinguished participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to extend my warmest welcome and utmost thanks to all the experts for participating in the North-west Atlantic regional workshop on ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs), the eighth regional workshop on EBSAs being convened by the CBD Secretariat.

My sincere thanks go to the Government of Canada for hosting this important workshop and for their kind financial support, which enabled the convening of this regional workshop. The CBD Secretariat values its close collaboration with the Government of Canada and appreciates their continued support of our work.

The CBD process to facilitate the description of EBSAs benefits greatly from linkages to the work of other relevant organizations as well as experiences from national-level processes. In this respect, the government of Canada has shown strong leadership and a commitment to identifying critical marine ecosystems through their national-level EBSA process, which has provided valuable insights to the CBD EBSA process. At the global level, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN has also proven to be an important partner, including through their work on Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs). The VME criteria support the identification of marine ecosystems that are especially vulnerable to impact from human activity and the selection of appropriate management measures once they are identified. In this way, the VME criteria complement the EBSA criteria in building an improved understanding of marine ecosystems and facilitating the application of appropriate policy responses.

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.

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. 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.

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 eighteenth 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.