



## Statement of the Executive Secretary for the Convention on Biological Diversity

**Braulio Ferreira de Souza Dias,**

**on the occasion of**

**World Environment Day – 5 June 2014**

**“Raise your voice, not the sea level”**

On this World Environment Day, celebrated during the International Year of Small Island Developing States, we raise our voices in unison to draw attention to the critical issues facing the world’s islands.

Islands constitute less than 5% of the Earth’s landmass yet provide habitat for 20% of all bird, reptile and plant species. Islands harbour more than 50% of the world’s known marine biodiversity, 7 of the world’s 10 coral reef hotspots and 10 of its 34 conservation hotspots. The conservation and sustainable use of the natural resources of islands is critical to achieving the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

Residents of islands understand the linkage between healthy ecosystems and biodiversity and human well-being. Biodiversity-based industries such as tourism and fisheries account for over half the GDP of the economies of Small Island Developing States. Coral reefs alone provide an estimated US\$375 billion every year in goods and services, globally.

Yet the biodiversity of islands is at risk. Due to the vulnerability of their endemic biota and their intense human use, islands have higher extinction rates. For example, 64% of all recorded extinctions in recent human history happened on islands. Extinction rates for mammals are 177 times higher in island ecosystems than the average globally.

Moreover, the special characteristics of islands and island biodiversity also make them highly vulnerable to a large range of potential impacts from climate change. Climate change and ocean acidification threaten marine resources, such as coral reefs that are suffering the effects of bleaching, pollution and other stressors. Projected sea-level rise poses a high risk for low-lying islands and their coastal resources, such as corals, mangroves and reef fish. Aichi Biodiversity Target 10 recognizes the need to minimize pressures on coral reefs and other ecosystems impacted by climate change and ocean acidification.

Resilient and healthy ecosystems are a cost-effective way of managing some of the adverse impacts of climate change, such as increased storm surge flooding and erosion. For example, it is estimated that coral reefs and seagrasses protect 5.5% of Jamaica’s GDP from sea-level rise and hurricanes. St. Lucia’s marine protected areas have produced significant gains to fish stocks and have also shown that protecting coral reef ecosystems assists in their recovery in the aftermath of natural disturbances such as hurricanes.

When appropriately designed, ecosystem restoration and management of terrestrial and coastal biodiversity including seagrasses, salt marshes, mangroves and forest ecosystems, can also increase



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carbon sequestration and decrease emissions from ecosystem degradation, thereby contributing to climate change mitigation. The negative impacts of climate change are projected to compound biodiversity loss through invasive species. Climate change is likely to increase opportunities for invasive species because of their adaptability to disturbance and to a broader range of biogeographic conditions and environmental controls. The impacts of those invasive species may be more severe as they increase both in numbers and extent, and as they compete for diminishing resources such as water. In this regard, achieving Aichi Biodiversity Target 9 is important where invasive alien species and pathways are identified and prioritized, priority species are controlled or eradicated, and measures are in place to manage pathways to prevent their introduction and establishment.

From the preservation of marine and coastal resources to climate change mitigation and adaption, from the production of renewable energy to the development of sustainable tourism, islands offer many lessons in resilience and sustainability. As discussions in the United Nations are progressing to frame new sustainable development goals, the experience and knowledge of islands can contribute significantly to the conservation and sustainable use of our planet's biodiversity and natural resources.

Pledges from island governments such as the Micronesia Challenge, the Caribbean Challenge Initiative and the upcoming Western Indian Ocean Coastal Challenge, together with cooperation platforms such as the Global Islands Partnership (GLISPA), are showing the way for successful multi-Party commitments in support of the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Such innovative projects have come to be known as "Bright Spots." These projects are making a difference in advancing conservation and sustainable livelihoods.

To achieve the goals of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its Aichi Biodiversity Targets, we need to build on these "Bright Spots." We need to identify those that have the potential to be scaled and replicated as solutions to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity throughout the world.

We also need to continue and build on the collaboration between the Rio Conventions – the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the Convention on Biological Diversity. All three of these historic environmental agreements address, in an inter-related way, the challenges of climate change, land degradation and biodiversity loss. And their work is of great relevance to islands.

As we celebrate World Environment Day 2014, let us celebrate the spirit of islands and islanders and work together for a sustainable future – a future of life in harmony with nature, the future we want.

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