



STATEMENT BY

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EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

at the opening of

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**Convention on
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Excellencies, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

I would first like to extend my appreciation for the invitation to speak at this, the first Arctic Biodiversity Congress, being convened by the Arctic Council's Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) working group. I am delighted to be part of this landmark event which demonstrates the importance the Arctic Council places on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in its work. It is a great pleasure to be here among so many dedicated Arctic leaders as we work to build a path towards our shared vision of a healthy, productive and resilient Arctic ecosystem.

The furthest reaches of the Arctic have long been a frontier where only the boldest dared to venture. Similarly, the Arctic has been a frontier for scientific discovery, pushing the boundaries of our understanding of this marvelous planet. And as our understanding of the Arctic has grown, we have come to the important realization that, despite its remoteness from much of the global population, Arctic biodiversity underpins global planetary health and well-being. It contributes to the healthy functioning of the global ecosystem and underpins many of the essential ecosystem services on which we all depend.

Despite its seemingly desolate landscape, the Arctic hosts an astounding diversity of species and habitats. It represents, as a whole, one of the most unique ecosystems on the planet, one which warrants special attention by the global community. The size and nature of Arctic ecosystems make them of critical importance to the biological, chemical and physical balance of the globe.

Let us not forget, however, that humans have long been part of Arctic ecosystems, and presently the Arctic is home to more than four million people. The people of the Arctic have close ties and a special relationship with biodiversity, which is a critical aspect of their social and cultural well-being.

Sadly, rapidly expanding pressures, such as climate change, ocean acidification, overfishing, unsustainable hunting and pollution, are driving biodiversity loss in the region and compromising the critical services provided by the Arctic. The flyways of migratory birds who depend on habitats in the Arctic span the entire globe. The same applies to migratory whales who move South to breed in warm tropical waters. Arctic biodiversity must therefore be seen as a global issue that requires strategy involving actions and partnerships both within the Arctic Circle and beyond.

It is the merit of CAFF to have brought these considerations into the discussions under the CBD. The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its Aichi Biodiversity Targets, adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the CBD in 2010, lay out an ambitious agenda to reverse the trends of global biodiversity loss. As many of these trends are especially pronounced in the polar regions, conserving and sustainably using Arctic biodiversity is a critical aspect of achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. It is therefore gratifying to see that the biodiversity-related work of the Arctic Council is drawing on its monitoring efforts to assess progress in implementing relevant Aichi Biodiversity Targets in the Arctic region. The proposed next Arctic Biodiversity Congress in 2019 would be an excellent time to discuss the success of the Arctic countries' regional progress towards attaining the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

Meeting the Aichi Biodiversity Targets in the Arctic requires tangible policy measures supported by sound science. In this regard, the CBD Secretariat signed a resolution of cooperation with

CAFF in 2009, which supports improved sharing of knowledge on Arctic biodiversity in order to enhance the capacity for implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity in the Arctic.

Cooperation between the CBD and CAFF was further strengthened in 2010 when the Conference of the Parties to the CBD invited the Arctic Council to provide relevant information and assessments of Arctic biodiversity through CAFF. The information provided by CAFF, first a report prepared for the fifteenth meeting of the Convention's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice and subsequently the *Arctic Biodiversity Assessment*, are essential contributions to the efforts of CBD Parties, other governments and relevant organizations in implementing the Convention in the Arctic region. It is now critical to act on these findings and to implement the recommendations of the *Arctic Biodiversity Assessment*. Please count on the CBD Secretariat as a partner ready to support your efforts in this regard. Likewise, it is also important to strengthen the partnership of CAFF with IPBES, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.

A recent example illustrating the importance of the work of CAFF to the CBD comes from the Arctic Regional Workshop to Facilitate the Description of Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas, also called EBSAs, which was held in March in Helsinki, Finland in March 2014. The invaluable scientific information provided by CAFF, along with the scientific inputs from many countries and other organizations in the region, provided a strong basis for the workshop to describe eleven areas meeting the EBSA criteria. The workshop was part of a broader ongoing global effort to identify the most "special" areas in the oceans of the world. The scientific collaboration facilitated through these workshops continues to build the knowledge base on ocean biodiversity in order to inform the efforts of countries and intergovernmental organizations in taking measures to improve conservation and sustainable use of the most ecologically significant areas of the ocean. I am pleased to report that the twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD, held two months ago in the Republic of Korea, decided to include the 157 EBSAs described through seven regional workshops including the one for the Arctic in the EBSA repository and to submit them to the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Also in other aspects, COP 12 was an important milestone for the global biodiversity community, taking place just one year before the halfway mark of the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity. It reviewed mid-term progress towards the Aichi Biodiversity targets and outlined a path forward to meet these Targets. The fourth edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook, or GBO-4, which was launched at COP 12, provides a global snapshot of the status of biodiversity and found that, while progress has been made in many areas, enhanced efforts are needed to get us on-track to meet these Targets. Some target components, such as protecting at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas and at least 10 per cent of coastal marine areas, are on track to be met. However, despite the dramatic increase in responses by Parties to the loss of biodiversity, indicators suggest that the status of biodiversity will continue to decline without urgent action—for the Arctic, this means the persistence of existing pollutants and emerging pollutants posing complex problems for species (Aichi Target 8); the decline of sea ice habitat due to climate change (Aichi Target 10 on ecosystems vulnerable to climate change; 14 on ecosystem services); and the loss of traditional knowledge, as evidenced by the increasing rate of language extinction (Aichi Target 18). More specifically on Aichi Target 10, COP 12 adopted a set of priority actions to achieve this target for coral reefs and closely associated ecosystems and called for strengthening of international and regional cooperation in support of national implementation of these actions.

For Aichi Target 11, the new Protected Planet report, prepared by UNEP and IUCN and launched at the World Parks Congress in Sydney, Australia, a few weeks ago, found that 15.4 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas and 3.4 per cent of the global ocean (or 8.4 per cent of marine areas under national jurisdiction) are now protected and thereby provided further confirmation that the world is on track to meet the area component of this target. With regard to Aichi Target 12, we now have information about 483 National Red Lists spanning 113 countries as well as Red Lists for 26 regions and 45 sub-national entities and these will enhance our ability for targeted protected of threatened species and for monitoring progress towards this target.

To speed up progress, in particular where implementation is lagging behind, COP 12 agreed on the Pyeongchang Road Map, a collection of six decisions including those on further actions to enhance the implementation of the Strategic Plan (decision XII/1); enhancing capacity-building and technical and scientific cooperation, communication, education and public awareness and the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity (decision XII/2); resource mobilization (decision XII/3); integrating biodiversity into the post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda (decision XII/4); the links between biodiversity and poverty eradication (decision XII/5) and cooperation with other conventions and international organisations (decision XII/6).

COP 12 also saw the launch of CBD Technical Series Number 75, *An Updated Synthesis of the Impacts of Ocean Acidification on Marine Biodiversity*. This report is the result of a major global effort to synthesize best available knowledge about the impacts of ocean acidification on marine biodiversity, a phenomenon which may be occurring faster at the poles than other climate regions. The Sustainable Ocean Initiative Global Partnership Meeting, held just prior to COP-12 prepared an Action Plan for the Sustainable Ocean Initiative 2015-2020 which was presented and launched at the High-Level Meeting in which a ministerial round table discussed ways to facilitate achievement of Aichi Targets 6, 10, 11 and 12 on marine and coastal biodiversity.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that COP 12, upon recommendations of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, decided to use the terminology “indigenous peoples and local communities” in future decisions and secondary documents under the Convention.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is clear that there are challenges ahead. But with these challenges come opportunities; opportunities to exercise our collective will for a better future for our planet. This Arctic Biodiversity Congress represents one of these opportunities that we must take hold of. I would like to challenge the Arctic Council and CAFF to speed up and scale up actions to implement the recommendations of the Arctic Biodiversity Assessment and the commitments under the CBD and, in particular, with the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. I look forward to this week’s discussions as a step forward to achieve our collective vision for healthy and sustainable Arctic ecosystems as an essential aspect of global sustainable development.

Thank you for your attention.