



STATEMENT BY

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CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

at the opening of the

**CBD EXPERT WORKSHOP TO PREPARE PRACTICAL GUIDANCE ON
PREVENTING AND MITIGATING THE SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE IMPACTS OF
MARINE DEBRIS ON MARINE AND COASTAL BIODIVERSITY AND HABITATS**

Baltimore, United States of America

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**Convention on
Biological Diversity**

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to extend my warmest welcome and utmost thanks to all of the experts from countries and organizations for participating in the CBD Expert Workshop to Prepare Practical Guidance on Preventing and Mitigating the Significant Adverse Impacts of Marine Debris on Marine and Coastal Biodiversity and Habitats.

I would like to thank the Government of the United States of America for hosting this important workshop. We greatly appreciate their warm welcome and kind hospitality in the maritime city of Baltimore. I wish to emphasize the importance of our collaboration with the United States of America, which has significant experience in addressing the impacts of marine debris on marine and coastal biodiversity and habitats.

I would also like to acknowledge with great appreciation the kind financial support of the European Commission, which allowed the convening of this workshop. My special thanks also go to various collaborating organizations such as the United Nations Environment Programme, the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel of the Global Environment Facility (GEF-STAP), and the Secretariat of the Convention on Migratory Species.

The famous American author John Steinbeck wrote about boat expeditions he made in 1940 in the Gulf of California in his book *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*:

“The debris from ships from hundreds of miles around is piled on this beach—mountains of sea-washed piles of it, mixed in with bottles and cans and pieces of clothing. It is the termination of some great sweeping in the Pacific.”¹

Steinbeck perceived the issue of marine debris as an aesthetic problem. Marine debris is, however, not only an aesthetic issue; it also harms marine organisms and negatively impacts the environment and human well-being. It is not only an acute environmental catastrophe, but rather a long-term, latent problem. Despite increasing research on this topic, we still have yet to fully grasp the complexity of the environmental and socio-economic impacts of marine debris, and its interactions with other major pressures.

The sources of marine debris are manifold and not entirely known. They range from land-based waste disposal, disposal of waste from vessels, derelict fishing gear, and natural and anthropogenic disasters. The direct impacts of marine debris on organisms, such as entanglement and ingestion, are only one aspect of the adverse consequences for marine ecosystems and coastal communities. As well, the impacts of marine debris do not always occur directly where waste has been introduced into the marine environment, but more commonly occur far away from the point of input. These far-reaching impacts of marine debris further complicate the problem and require enhanced collaboration among countries and organizations in addressing this issue.

Preventing and mitigating the impacts of marine debris is an essential aspect of achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, in particular Target 8, which calls for pollution, including from excess nutrients, to be brought to levels that are not detrimental to ecosystem function and biodiversity by 2020. Addressing marine debris is also a critical aspect of achieving a number of the other targets, including Target 9 on invasive alien species and Target 10 on reducing anthropogenic pressures on coral reefs and other vulnerable ecosystems.

In recognition of the importance of addressing marine debris in achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, the eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD in 2012 requested the Executive Secretary, in collaboration with Parties, other Governments, relevant organizations and indigenous and

¹ Steinbeck/Ricketts, *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, 1995, 206.

local communities to organize an expert workshop to prepare practical guidance on preventing and mitigating the significant adverse impacts of marine debris on marine and coastal biodiversity and habitats that can be applied by Parties and other Governments in their implementation of the programme of work on marine and coastal biodiversity.

We are here this week to respond to this request and provide CBD Parties and other Governments with guidance to support science-based decision-making and enhanced implementation in addressing this urgent issue.

As shown in the background materials prepared for this workshop as well as the CBD Technical Series No 67 containing the previous synthesis undertaken by GEF-STAP in collaboration with the Secretariat, CBD Parties, other Governments and relevant organizations possess a wide range of knowledge and experience with regards to understanding the impacts of marine debris and taking measures to prevent and mitigate those impacts. This workshop will facilitate synthesizing this knowledge and experience into practical guidance to provide governments with the knowledge and tools they need to safeguard the marine environment and coastal communities from this pressing threat and support the healthy functioning of marine ecosystems and their essential role in sustainable development.

The urgent need to address marine debris has emerged as global priority in recent years, as evidenced by increased calls for action from various global fora. At Rio+20 in 2012, governments committed to take action to reduce the incidence and impacts of such pollution on marine ecosystems. In June this year, the first session of the United Nations Environment Assembly adopted a resolution on marine plastic debris and microplastics. The United Nations Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals have also included a specific target on marine debris in their proposal to the UN General Assembly for a new set of Sustainable Development Goals.

This workshop will provide for a critical opportunity to support governments in responding to these global calls for action. Drawing on your knowledge and experience, we can formulate practical guidance that helps to achieve clean and healthy seas, while also enhancing awareness and collaboration among stakeholders and across sectors to ensure sustainable use of the oceans.

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

Thank you for your attention.