



**MESSAGE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY  
OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY  
BRAULIO FERREIRA DE SOUZA DIAS  
on the occasion of  
WORLD WATER DAY  
22 March 2015**

*“Water and sustainable development”*

Water is one of our most precious natural resources. Ensuring a clean, healthy and sustainable water supply is now the highest of natural resources management issues. The most recent edition of the *Global Risks* report of the World Economic Forum<sup>1</sup> places global water crises as the top risk in terms of impact and among the top ten in terms of likelihood. Water is also tied to many of the other top ten risks.

The importance of water to sustainable development is well recognized. In order to function, all terrestrial ecosystems, including coastal areas, require water to be available and of sufficient quality.

However, ecosystems supported by biodiversity provide water-related services and are critical for sustaining water in order to meet human needs. For example, wetlands, forests and grasslands act as natural water infrastructure. Their conservation and sustainable management provide important tools for ensuring the availability of water, including during the extremes of droughts and floods, as well as helping maintain water quality. Better management of soil health and soil biodiversity, as well as natural infrastructure in farming landscapes are also key for achieving water security, and also underpin food security and disaster risk reduction. If we make better use of this natural infrastructure, we will deliver improved and more sustainable water security, economic performance and increased resilience in the face of climate change.

This year’s World Water Day theme, “Water and sustainable development”, coincides with the ongoing discussions in the United Nations of the post-2015 development agenda and the adoption of a set of new sustainable development goals and targets expected later this year. I am pleased to see that this agenda, still under discussion, already recognizes the importance of water in proposed Goal 6 (“Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”). It is particularly notable that its target 6.6 (“by 2020 protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes”) recognizes the role of ecosystems in achieving the goal. This target builds on discussions held under the Convention on Biological Diversity leading up to the adoption in 2010 of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and, in particular, the incorporation of water into Aichi Biodiversity Target 14 (By 2020, ecosystems that provide essential services, including services related to water, and contribute to health, livelihoods and well-being, are restored and safeguarded, taking into

<sup>1</sup> See <http://reports.weforum.org/global-risks-2015/>.



**Convention on  
Biological Diversity**

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account the needs of women, indigenous and local communities, and the poor and vulnerable). The role of ecosystems in underpinning water was also clearly recognized in the outcomes of the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20).

It is encouraging to see this critically important shift in thinking about the water-biodiversity relationship. We are now moving away from focusing solely on managing the impact of water on biodiversity to recognizing the central role that biodiversity plays as a solution for achieving sustainable water security. This is just one example of the important ways in which biodiversity and ecosystem services contribute to human well-being and forge one of the most critical elements for achieving the sustainable development goals and the post-2015 development agenda.

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