



STATEMENT BY

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CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

at the opening of

**CBD REGIONAL WORKSHOP TO FACILITATE THE DESCRIPTION OF
ECOLOGICALLY OR BIOLOGICALLY SIGNIFICANT MARINE AREAS (EBSAS) IN
THE NORTH-EAST INDIAN OCEAN REGION**

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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 from countries and organizations for participating in the North-East Indian Ocean regional workshop on ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs), the tenth regional workshop on EBSAs being convened by the CBD Secretariat.

My sincere thanks go to the Government of Sri Lanka for hosting this important workshop and to the Government of Japan, through the Japan Biodiversity Fund, for providing financial support, which enabled the convening of this regional workshop and the participation of experts from the region.

I would also like to thank the South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP) and the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem Project (BOBLME) for their excellent collaboration and support in the convening of this workshop. I wish to also acknowledge, with great appreciation, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO) of Australia for providing the scientific and technical support for this workshop, which was also facilitated through the support by the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem Project.

The Indian Ocean is known as *Ratnakara* in the ancient Sanskrit literature, which translates to “ocean” and “repository of jewels”. The Indian Ocean is the smallest, youngest and one of the most physically complex of the world’s major oceans. Beyond its highly productive continental margins, the open ocean and deep-sea areas of the Indian Ocean host a wide range of unique and diverse marine life and provide ecologically critical habitats for marine mammals. The marine biodiversity of the Indian Ocean contributes to the region’s social well-being, economic development and environmental health, and thereby constituting a central aspect of the historical and cultural heritage of the people and communities of the region. As such, the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity underpins sustainable development of the countries in this region, and is essential to the achievement of the goals of the Convention.

As communities around the world strive to achieve sustainable development, they face multiple challenges due to unprecedented biodiversity loss arising from overfishing, pollution, habitat destruction, and emerging threats of global-scale climate change and ocean acidification, among other pressures. Ultimately, the loss and degradation of biodiversity as a result of these pressures compromises the crucial services provided by marine ecosystems and undermines the functioning of the Earth’s life support system.

Addressing these pressures is a prominent challenge; however global leaders have recognized the urgency of confronting this challenge and taking action to improve the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity, including in the ongoing discussions on the post-2015 development agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. The proposed Sustainable Development Goal 14 aims to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development and emphasizes the strong linkages between marine and coastal biodiversity and broader sustainable development objectives.

World leaders have also 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.

But in order to effectively protect and conserve marine biodiversity, we have first to know where to take action. The need to improve knowledge about the marine ecosystem is not only a prerequisite for sustainable use of marine resources but also vital to repairing past damage and environmental degradation.

It is in this respect that the CBD's work on EBSAs plays a key role. Through an inclusive and science-driven process, the regional EBSA workshops have sought to describe the areas or "special places" 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 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 also emphasized that the identification of EBSAs and the selection of conservation and management measures is a matter for States and competent intergovernmental organizations.

Since 2011, the CBD Secretariat has convened nine regional workshops to facilitate the description of areas meeting the EBSA criteria, pursuant to COP decisions X/29 and XI/17. These workshops covered nearly 70% of world's oceans and involved about 122 countries and 92 organizations, with some attending more than one workshop.

At its twelfth meeting, COP welcomed the outputs of the seven regional EBSA workshops held since its eleventh meeting. Combined with the outputs of the two regional EBSA workshops that were considered by the COP at its eleventh meeting, a total of 204 areas have been described as meeting the EBSA criteria. Pursuant to a request by the COP at its 12th meeting, the summary reports on the outputs of the regional EBSA workshops have been submitted to the General Assembly and its relevant Working Groups. The scientific information used in the description of these areas are being made available online through the CBD's EBSA website and repository.

The EBSA process undertaken since the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, 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.

Let us take this workshop as an opportunity to create partnerships and networks among the experts from this region to further enhance our knowledge on the "special places" of the Indian Ocean and provide a sound basis for future action to further enhance our current efforts toward achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets in marine and coastal areas of this region.

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

Thank you for your attention.