



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-WEST
INDIAN OCEAN REGION AND ADJACENT GULF AREAS**

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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 of the experts from countries and organizations for participating in the North-West Indian Ocean and Adjacent Gulf Areas regional workshop on ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs), the eleventh regional workshop on EBSAs being convened by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

My sincere thanks go to the Government of the United Arab Emirates 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 United Nations Environment Programme's Regional Office for West Asia (ROWA), the Convention on Migratory Species Office – Abu Dhabi, the Regional Organization for the Conservation of the Environment of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden (PERSGA), the Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME), and the Abu Dhabi Global Environmental Data Initiative (AGEDI) for their collaboration and support in the convening of this workshop.

The North-West Indian Ocean and the Adjacent Gulf Areas are among the most important global repositories of marine biodiversity. For example, the world's second-largest population of the charismatic dugong relies on this region's rich and extensive beds of seagrass. Marine biodiversity is also a critical aspect of the historical and cultural heritage of the people who live around the Indian Ocean. The region's social well-being, economic development and environmental health are critically dependent upon the Indian Ocean. As such, the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity underpins sustainable development in the region and is integral to the achievement of the goals of the Convention.

During this workshop, on 22 April, the world community will celebrate the annual International Mother Earth Day, which reflects the interdependence between human beings, other living species and the planet. As communities around the world strive to achieve a balance between economic, social and environmental needs, they face multiple challenges due to unprecedented biodiversity loss in marine and coastal areas caused by overfishing, habitat destruction and the emerging threat of global-scale climate change, among others.

I would like to remind you that 2015 is an important year for the future of Mother Earth. World leaders have recognized the urgency of confronting the challenge to achieve sustainable development and the necessity of taking action to improve the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity, as reflected in the ongoing discussion on the post-2015 development agenda and the sustainable development goals. Proposed Goal 14 aims at the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources.

When looking at the proposed sustainable development goals, I can clearly see a link to the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 states that, by 2020, at least 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. Area-based conservation measures, including marine protected areas, are tools for the conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of its components.

However, in order to protect and conserve marine biodiversity effectively, we first have to know where to take action. Improvement of scientific knowledge about marine ecosystems is not only a prerequisite for the sustainable use of marine resources; it is also vital to repairing past environmental

degradation. Through an inclusive and science-driven process, the regional EBSA workshops have endeavoured to describe the areas or “special places” of the oceans that are crucial to the healthy functioning of global marine ecosystems.

In decision X/29, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention 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. The Conference of the 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, and in accordance with decisions X/29 and XI/17, the CBD Secretariat has convened ten regional workshops to facilitate the description of areas meeting the EBSA criteria. The latest was convened last month in Colombo, Sri Lanka, for the North-East Indian Ocean region. These workshops have covered nearly 70 per cent of the world’s oceans and involved more than 100 countries, with some attending multiple workshops, and 95 organizations.

At its twelfth meeting, the Conference of the Parties 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 Conference of the Parties at its eleventh meeting, a total of 204 areas have been described as meeting the EBSA criteria. Pursuant to a request by the Conference of the Parties at its twelfth meeting, the summary reports on the outputs of the seven regional EBSA workshops have recently been submitted to the United Nations General Assembly and its relevant working groups. The scientific information used in the description of these areas is being made available online through the CBD EBSA website and repository (www.cbd.int/ebsa).

The EBSA process undertaken since the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties has facilitated the sharing of scientific information and data, and the networking of experts across disciplines at the regional scale, and has enhanced collaboration between various regional initiatives for marine conservation and sustainable use. It has provided a regional platform for a scientific assessment of the ecological or biological significance of marine areas.

At this workshop, let us take the opportunity to create partnerships and networks among the experts from this region to further enhance our knowledge on the “special places” of the North-West Indian Ocean Region and Adjacent Gulf Areas. Let us provide a sound scientific basis for future action to further enhance our current efforts towards achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets in the marine and coastal area of this region.

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

Thank you for your attention.