



**MESSAGE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
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**on the occasion of
WORLD OCEANS DAY**

8 June 2015

“Healthy oceans, healthy planet”

Oceans are essential for supporting life on Earth and for human well-being. The oceans cover more than 70 per cent of our planet, and over 40 per cent of the world’s population (almost 3 billion people) lives within 100 kilometres of the coast. And while oceans remain one of the least explored areas of our planet, their importance cannot be underestimated.

More than four billion people rely on fish for a substantial share of their protein intake. The oceans support essential biogeochemical processes, supplying, for example, half of the oxygen we breathe, and contain some 250,000 known species, with many more waiting to be discovered. They also have the potential to provide a vast number of medicines and biochemicals. Clearly, human health and the health of the oceans are closely intertwined, a reality aptly represented in this year’s World Oceans Day theme: “Healthy oceans, healthy planet.”

However, the world’s oceans and seas are changing. Human activities are taking a terrible toll. Marine ecosystems are being damaged by over-exploitation, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, destructive fishing practices and marine pollution. Increased sea temperatures and sea-level rise, caused by climate change, as well as ocean acidification, pose a further threat to marine life, coastal and island communities, and national economies. And yet we all, wherever we live, rely on these oceans and seas for our very livelihoods.

This may sound grim. Yet, people and communities around the world are developing measures and taking responsibility to conserve and restore marine and coastal biodiversity, not only for this generation to use and enjoy, but for many more generations to come. At its tenth meeting, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2010-2020, with its 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets, which has become a widely agreed framework for action on biodiversity, supported by the other biodiversity-related conventions and the United Nations General Assembly. Through the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity, Parties have committed to achieving a new vision for the world’s biodiversity: “by 2050, biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored and wisely used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people.”



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To achieve this vision, Parties to the Convention, through the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, have made tangible commitments to achieve sustainable fisheries, protect at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas by 2020, address invasive alien species and reduce the pressures on coral reefs, among other ambitious commitments. “Biodiversity for Sustainable Development” was the motto of the twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, held last year in Pyeongchang, Republic of Korea. There, countries considered ecologically or biologically significant marine areas of the world’s oceans and seas, addressed the impacts of underwater noise and ocean acidification on marine and coastal biodiversity, developed priority actions to achieve Aichi Biodiversity Target 10 (by 2015, the multiple anthropogenic pressures on coral reefs, and other vulnerable ecosystems impacted by climate change or ocean acidification are minimized, so as to maintain their integrity and functioning.) and provided guidance on capacity-building activities within the framework of the Sustainable Ocean Initiative.

Likewise, world leaders have recognized the urgency of confronting the challenge to achieve sustainable development and the necessity to take action to improve the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity, as reflected in the on-going discussion on the post-2015 development agenda and the sustainable development goals. Proposed Goal 14 aims to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

Countries thus reaffirmed that our future lies with the oceans and recognized that strong evidence has been compiled to emphasize the need for urgent action to protect its biodiversity. As such, it becomes apparent that achieving the Strategic Plan requires us to abandon business as-usual approaches and to mainstream biodiversity into our development. The time is now ripe for us to change the way we perceive the value of oceans and the marine life therein as well as how we consume the goods and services provided by oceans: the very basis of our sustainability in this planet.

I invite you to use the opportunity of this year’s World Oceans Day to learn more about the ways and means to protect this vital part of our planet. As Jacques Cousteau, the great oceanographer, so aptly put it: “People can be happy only when they marvel at nature, when they marvel at creation and at their surroundings. Whatever they love, they wish to protect.”

We need to act now to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity and the fair and equitable sharing of its benefits. It is time for us to join together and use our collective wisdom, experiences and expertise to achieve these objectives and secure our common future on this blue planet. May this year be a new turning point to together celebrate the beauty, the wealth and the promise of our oceans.
