STATEMENT BY

MR. BRAULIO F. DE SOUZA DIAS

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

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 SEAS OF EAST ASIA

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Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity
United Nations Environment Programme
413 Saint-Jacques Street, Suite 800, Montreal, QC, H2Y 1N9, Canada
Tel : +1 514 288 2220 Fax : +1 514 288 6588
secretariat@cbd.int www.cbd.int

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 regional workshop on ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs) in the Seas of East Asia, the twelfth regional workshop on EBSAs being convened by the CBD Secretariat.

My sincere thanks go to the Government of China, in particular the Ministry of Environmental Protection, for hosting this important workshop in the beautiful coastal city of Xiamen. Xiamen is known to the world as one of the most successful examples of implementing the integrated ocean and coastal management through the effective cooperation among local stakeholders under the leadership of the Xiamen municipal government. It is worthwhile to note that the development and implementation of Xiamen's coastal use zoning plan has facilitated the application of marine use zoning at the national scale in China, as shown in the adoption of a marine zoning plan for 2011-2020.

I wish to also acknowledge with great appreciation the Government of Japan, through the Japan Biodiversity Fund, for providing financial support to convene this regional workshop, as well as the European Commission for providing financial support to enable the scientific and technical preparation for this workshop in collaboration with the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO) of Australia.

Biological diversity underpins ecosystem functioning and the provision of ecosystem services essential for human well-being. The importance of biodiversity as an integral part of sustainable development lies at the core of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets, which were adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 2010.

The seas of East Asia are known as global hotspots for marine and coastal biodiversity, with a total sea area of about 7 million sq. km, a coastline of 234,000 km and a total watershed area covering 8 million sq. km. This region, inhabited by slightly more than one third of the world's population, covers about eight large marine ecosystems (LMEs) which support a range of diverse ecosystems and sustain one of the world's largest centres of marine biodiversity. As such, marine and coastal biodiversity constitutes an integral part of the historical and cultural heritage of the people and communities of this region. Over the past four decades, however, the pressures from a rapid increase in the coastal population, extensive industrialization and socio-economic development in this region have resulted in unprecedented biodiversity loss, in particular due to overfishing, pollution and habitat destruction. The functional integrity of marine and coastal ecosystems have thus been undermined, affecting the very basis of natural resources that have supported fast-growing economies as well as the livelihoods of local coastal communities.

In addition, like other coastal communities around the world striving to achieve sustainable development, countries and local communities in this region also face multiple challenges due to emerging threats of global-scale climate change and ocean acidification. Ultimately, the loss and degradation of biodiversity as a result of these pressures compromise the crucial services provided by marine ecosystems and undermine the functioning of the Earth's life support system. As voiced in many ocean forums being held in conjunction with the twenty-first Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Paris in the past two weeks, the degradation of marine biodiversity will critically hamper our ability to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change. The outcome of COP 21, a commitment to reduce emissions to limit the global temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels, explicitly acknowledges "the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including oceans, and the protection of biodiversity...when taking action to address climate change."

Ladies and gentlemen,

Global leaders have recognized the urgency of confronting these challenges and of taking action to improve the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity, including through the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals, recently adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. In particular, 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 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.

In order to achieve the outcomes of marine biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, however, we must first know where to take action. The need to improve knowledge about marine ecosystems is not only a prerequisite for sustainable use of marine resources but also vital to repairing existing damage and environmental degradation.

It is in this respect that the work of CBD 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. It was highlighted that areas found to meet the EBSA criteria may require enhanced conservation and management measures, which 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 11 regional workshops to facilitate the description of areas meeting the EBSA criteria, pursuant to COP decisions X/29, XI/17 and XII/22. These workshops have covered more than 70 per cent of the world's oceans and involved 141 countries and 137 organizations, with some attending more than one workshop. So far, a total of 204 areas have been described as meeting the EBSA criteria and considered by COP 11 and COP 12. Pursuant to requests by COP11 and COP 12, the summary reports on the outputs of these regional EBSA workshops have been submitted to the United Nations General Assembly and its relevant working groups. This information on EBSA descriptions has been also made available online through the CBD EBSA website (www.cbd.int/ebsa) 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 on a 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 values 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 of the "special places" of the seas of East Asia and provide a sound basis for future action to further enhance our current efforts towards 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.

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