



*Distinguished Participants,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the Government of Madagascar for hosting this workshop here in beautiful Nosy Be. I would especially like to thank the Ministry of Environment, Ecology, Sea and Forests for their kind cooperation in organizing the workshop.

My sincere thanks also go to the Secretariat of the Nairobi Convention, the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association and many other collaborators for providing valuable technical inputs to the workshop. I would also like to acknowledge, with great appreciation, the financial contribution of the Government of Japan, through the Japan Biodiversity Fund, and the Government of France, through the French MPA Agency, which supported the organization of this workshop.

The setting is very appropriate for the discussions to take place this week. Indeed, such a picturesque location truly reminds us of what we stand to lose if we do not take action to enhance the conservation and sustainable use of our precious oceans.

Biological diversity underpins ecosystem functioning and the provisioning of ecosystem services essential for human well-being. The oceans, and the life therein, are critical to the healthy functioning of the planet. In fact, the biogeochemical processes they support provide half of the oxygen we breathe. Oceans provide billions of people with a substantial share of their protein intake, and support the livelihood and cultural well-being of many around the world. Clearly, the health of the oceans and the future of sustainable development are intimately intertwined.

In addition, countries and local communities in this region and around the world face multiple challenges resulting from 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 stated in many ocean forums held in conjunction with COP 21 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Paris last month, 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."

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. These targets, adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 2010, lay out an ambitious agenda for achieving a future in which ecosystems are able to provide critical services that underpin planetary well-being, and in which the global community can sustainably and equitably benefit from biodiversity without impacting the ability of future generations to do so.

The importance of marine biodiversity to sustainable development was further recognized in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals, recently adopted by the UN General Assembly. In this process, global leaders emphasized the urgency of taking action to improve the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity. In particular, 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, and reflects the key elements of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Parties to the Convention have acknowledged the major challenges they face in their efforts to achieve the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. They include a lack of institutional, technical, managerial and

scientific capacity as well as governance challenges and a limited information base in many areas. These challenges outline the urgent need for expanded efforts to develop the capacity of Parties and facilitate partnerships among relevant stakeholders.

The Sustainable Ocean Initiative, or SOI, which is coordinated by the CBD Secretariat, aims to address these calls and respond to the urgent need for capacity development. SOI is a global partnership platform focused on facilitating information-sharing and learning from experience across sectors, improving the scientific basis for implementation and creating partnerships that can provide targeted capacity-building, training, technical assistance and learning exchange. In doing so, SOI aims to enhance the capacity of countries to achieve the Aichi Targets, building on the commitments of CBD Parties, the work of the CBD on marine biodiversity and the many relevant experiences and activities of partners around the world. It aims to package and deliver a wide range of resources, knowledge and initiatives from around the world in order to meet regional and national priorities for capacity-building.

The SOI Action Plan 2015-2020 includes a focus on regional-scale learning and exchange of experiences, which is where this workshop comes into play. The experts from Governments, regional organizations and initiatives with us this week possess a wealth of knowledge and experiences with regard to multilateral cooperation and facilitating implementation, and yet, face many of the same challenges acknowledged by CBD Parties around the world. This week, we will engage you all in focused technical discussions on various tools and approaches to address these challenges in an integrated manner, in particular through the application of marine spatial planning, and capitalize on opportunities to make progress towards achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets in marine and coastal areas.

This workshop also builds on previous work and ongoing collaboration between the CBD and Parties and organizations in East Africa. The Southern Indian Ocean Regional Workshop to Facilitate the Description of Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas, convened by the CBD Secretariat in collaboration with the Secretariat of the Nairobi Convention in Mauritius in 2012, synthesized extensive scientific information on the region's marine biodiversity and ecosystems. The importance of building on this work, especially in capacity-building activities, was emphasized by the Conference of the Parties to the Nairobi Convention, at its eighth meeting in June 2015, which also invited its Contracting Parties to collaborate with the CBD Secretariat, the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association and other partners on capacity-building, implementation and sharing of experiences on integrated marine spatial planning in support of the blue economy.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

The fourth edition of the *Global Biodiversity Outlook*, published in 2014, suggests that significant progress has been made towards meeting some components of most of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. However, indicators suggest that the status of biodiversity will continue to decline without urgent action. Reversing these trends will require enhanced dialogue and coordinated action by all sectors and stakeholders, a common vision, as well as a strategic focus on capacity development.

If we are to achieve the goals of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, we will have to abandon business-as-usual approaches and mainstream biodiversity into our development planning, governance and decision-making. And we will have to mobilize the resources needed to address key capacity gaps that prevent many from taking the steps needed to achieve these goals.

Let us take this workshop as an opportunity to forge partnerships, facilitate collaboration, learn from each other and identify steps for enhanced implementation, and work towards realizing our collective vision for healthy, productive and sustainable oceans for East Africa.

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

Thank you for your attention.