



OPENING STATEMENT BY

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CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

**On the occasion of the
“Muuchtanbal” Summit on Indigenous Experiences
Traditional knowledge, biological and cultural diversity**

**Cancun, Mexico
10 December 2016**



**Convention on
Biological Diversity**

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Distinguished guests,
Panellists and participants,

I am honoured to speak this morning at the opening of this unique and powerful initiative, the “Muuchtanbal” Summit on Indigenous and Local Experiences — Traditional knowledge, biological and cultural diversity.

This Summit is an example of what can be achieved through partnership and I want to thank our many partners – the Government of Mexico.

What started at earlier COPs as a series of IPLC side events has blossomed into a detailed, comprehensive and strategic pathway for IPLCs throughout the COP, culminating in this Summit.

Without you at our side, none of this would be possible.

Our host, Mexico, is a mega-diverse country blessed with nature’s gifts and cultural diversity. Together, nature and culture have co-evolved over generations, in mutually supportive ways, demonstrative of biocultural diversity.

I want to recognize the many indigenous peoples and local communities from Mexico that are here for this Summit, as well as our international guests.

Indigenous and local communities are tangible examples of local sustainable production systems that help us to understand the critical role that biocultural diversity plays in achieving the goals of the Convention on Biological Diversity and in advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals.

Since the very beginning of my time at CBD, I have felt a natural alliance with indigenous peoples and local communities as on-the-ground implementers of the Convention — as leaders of in situ conservation, protectors of ecosystems, defenders of waters and soils, keepers of diverse traditional crops and animals and holders of generations of traditional knowledge, necessary for sustaining life on this planet.

Therefore, it is a particular pleasure for me to witness the advances being made, in increasing the visibility of indigenous peoples and local communities in the work of the Convention, including the contribution of your collective actions to the goals of the Convention — conservation, sustainable use and equitably sharing of benefits related to genetic resources.

Correspondingly, within the international community, there is an increasing recognition and understanding of the links between biological and cultural diversity and the practical benefits, for human health and well-being, as well as for building resilient, sustainable and economically viable communities, while also contributing to the conservation of nature.

Also, I have witnessed and actively advocated for, along with our friends – the ICCA Consortium – the recognition of community conservation, and I am happy to have participated in and witnessed a sea change in the conservation paradigm – and a movement towards people-centred conservation.

Many Parties are embracing partnerships with indigenous peoples and local communities, and, increasingly, the potential of community conservation is being recognized.

The historical experience of indigenous peoples and local communities as often being victims of protected areas is changing, and, increasingly, you are viewed as essential partners if protected areas are to be effective.

Some excellent examples are emerging concerning the value of recognizing community conservation — for instance, Australia was able to reach the 17% target of protected areas (Aichi Target 11) five years ahead of 2020 by recognizing and supporting indigenous protected areas

(IPAs) also referred to as ICCAs. 9% of Australia's protected areas are Indigenous Protected Areas or ICCAs.

These local-level initiatives are demonstrative of on-the-ground implementation – something very dear to my heart.

Not only protectors of biological diversity, IPLCs are also proponents of humanity's cultural diversity.

Cultural and biological diversity are closely intertwined and more importantly appear dependent upon one another.

The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity¹ emphasizes that:

As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature.

In this sense, I would argue that both cultural and biological diversity are the *common heritage of humanity* and must be affirmed as such for the benefit of present and future generations.

These cultural and biological components of the Earth's diversity are not only closely related but are also inextricably linked. They have co-evolved and continue to change in an interdependent and mutually reinforcing way.

It is no coincidence that areas high in cultural diversity, including linguistic diversity, are also high in biological diversity.

The convergence between bio and cultural diversity extends far beyond what we refer to as “diversity hotspots”. In fact, not just the quantity but also the quality of biodiversity depends on the presence of cultural diversity and vice versa.

Determined action to value and protect both biodiversity and cultural diversity can benefit people in many ways, including through better health, food security, access to clean water, and less poverty. It will also help to slow climate change by enabling ecosystems to store and absorb more carbon. It will also help people adapt to climate change by adding resilience to both human communities and ecosystems and making them less vulnerable, and by providing the needed genetic resources to adapt the food systems to face the impacts of climate change.

In order to promote coordination across the international system on issues related to biological and cultural diversity, and to advance our understanding of the links between the two, in 2010 the SCBD-UNESCO Joint Programme on the Links between Biological and Cultural Diversity was established, and was welcomed at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention² and by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee.³

The Joint Programme recognizes diversity as an essential feature of our planet and as one of the building blocks of life. Diversity of species, ecosystems, landscapes and seascapes are continuously interacting with the diversity of human communities, through their livelihoods and management practices, languages, belief and knowledge systems, and social structures.

This work has been supported regionally through such initiatives as the first European conference on the links between biological and cultural diversity, held in Florence, Italy, in 2014,

¹ Adopted 2 November 2001, Article 1, Cultural diversity: the common heritage of humanity

Full text at: http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.phpURL_ID=13179&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

² Nagoya, Japan (see decision X/20, 2010).

³ Brasilia, July 2010.

and the first Asian Regional Conference on Biocultural Diversity, held in Ishikawa Prefecture, Japan, in October of this year.

The Joint Programme continues to inspire and encourage further regional initiatives, including discussions about a potential regional conference for the Americas, led by the Center for Biodiversity and Conservation at the American Museum of Natural History, and one for the Pacific region, led by the Australian National University, in the biennium 2017-2018.

The ongoing work of the Joint Programme is assisting the international community in advancing our understanding of the concept of biocultural diversity as a complex interplay between biodiversity and cultural diversity with vital impacts on economic, political, environmental, social and cultural sustainability.

Together with UNESCO, our partner in the Joint Programme, we will commit to further exploring and assisting Parties in implementing integrated approaches to conservation, sustainable and equitable use and transmission of local biocultural diversity, including by enhancing and supporting local and traditional knowledge systems, technologies and cultural practices.

The *Local Biodiversity Outlook*, which is complementary to the fourth edition of the *Global Biodiversity Outlook* and which will be released tomorrow (Sunday, reception 17.00), tells us that:

60% of the crops consumed worldwide originate from the indigenous agricultural systems of Latin America – corn/maize, tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, to name a few.

It is therefore critical for food security that traditional knowledge for resilient and diverse crops, as well as traditional knowledge for soil fertility and water management, and IPLC views be taken into account in food production.

Regarding tourism, 30% of the global tourism market is requesting cultural components to their tourism experience — the potential for IPLCs and local economies is tremendous.

Recognizing the collective contributions of IPLCs is a prerequisite for achieving the 2050 Vision of the Strategic Plan.

Living in Harmony with Nature

The Secretariat is committed to taking this work forward, and I invite this Summit to present the outcomes of this important event next week to the plenary of the Conference of the Parties, in order to contribute to achieving the goals of the Strategic Plan by 2020.

Your outputs can also inform discussion under the theme for the next COP (COP 14), “Living in Harmony with Nature” and contribute to thinking about the post-2020 arrangements for the Convention.

I look forward to hearing more from this Summit about how we can promote diverse and culturally appropriate means of local development and possible contributions to the four thematic areas established by our Mexican hosts – agriculture, fisheries, forestry and tourism.

Finally, I wish you good luck for the significant discussions ahead and look forward to the results for the benefit of both the Convention on Biological Diversity and the relevant UNESCO conventions.

Thank you.