



**MESSAGE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
BRAULIO FERREIRA DE SOUZA DIAS
on the occasion of
WORLD WETLANDS DAY
2 February 2017
“Wetlands for disaster risk reduction”**

All around the world, wetlands provide huge benefits, including clean water, ensuring a stable water supply, and providing important habitat to a wide variety of species. Wetlands are also important for disaster risk reduction. Approximately 90 per cent of disasters are caused by water-related hazards, such as floods and droughts. As recognized in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030¹, wetlands and the ecosystem services they provide are critical to reduce disaster and climate risks and to build resilience to climate extremes.

Wetlands are defined as land areas flooded with water, either seasonally or permanently. Along the coastline, wetlands act as a natural buffer against disasters. Inland, they act as a natural sponge, absorbing and storing excess rainfall and reducing flooding. In drought-prone areas, they release the stored water, which helps delay the onset of droughts and reduce water shortages.

Healthy wetlands help minimize erosion and storm damage. Healthy wetlands also help communities bounce back. Following a 1999 cyclone that hit Odisha in eastern India, rice paddies protected by mangroves recovered their food production much faster than croplands without the buffer.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicts that even more extreme events can be expected in the future as a result of climate change. This expected increase in the frequency of climate and weather-related disasters will mean that maintaining wetlands will prove even more critical in coming years.

Unfortunately, however, wetlands continue to be lost at an alarming rate. Estimates suggest that globally, 64 per cent have disappeared since 1900 and 87 per cent have been lost since 1700. Main causes include

¹ Adopted at the Third UN World Conference in Sendai, Japan, on 18 March, 2015.



changes in land use, water diversion (dams, dikes and canalization), infrastructure development, air and water pollution, and excess nutrients.

The important role of wetlands is recognized in the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in Goal 6 on water, and Goal 14 on oceans and coasts, and Goal 15 on, terrestrial biodiversity and ecosystems. Many of the SDG targets indicate the need to safeguard and restore ecosystems as a vital strategy for a sustainable and secure world.

While their value is increasingly recognized, the protection and restoration of wetlands needs to be much more effectively addressed. Governments need to take steps now to integrate wetland protection into their decision-making and policies and in their plans for the future. To quote from the Cancun Declaration, adopted at the UN Biodiversity Conference in December 2016, “It is essential to live in harmony with nature and mother earth, as a fundamental condition for the well-being of all life, which depends on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and the ecosystem services it underpins.”
