



**STATEMENT BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
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ON THE OCCASION OF THE GENERAL DEBATE, UNWTO GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Madame President, Your Excellencies, Ministers of Tourism, dear Secretary General Mr. Taleb Rifai, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank the United Nations World Tourism Organization for inviting me to this General Assembly to outline the strong links between sustainable tourism development and biodiversity. Indeed many of you have spoken in your interventions today about harmony between human beings and nature. UN Convention on Biological Diversity is a Rio Convention that entered into force 25 years ago, together with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification also known as the Rio Conventions. With 196 Parties, UNCBD enjoys near universal membership. It has three objectives, namely (a) conservation of biodiversity; (b) sustainable use of its components and (c) fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources. For all of us, biodiversity means fresh water, clean air, food security and health. However, this essential foundation for human wellbeing and sustainable development is seriously threatened in what many call the 6th global extinction.

The tourism sector has a critical stake in efforts to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, as healthy natural landscapes and wildlife offer one of the main attractions. For example, in the US in 2016, 331 million national park visitors spent an estimated \$18.4 billion in local gateway regions while visiting national parks across the country. These expenditures supported a total of 318.1 thousand jobs, and \$34.9 billion in economic output to the national economy.¹ Indeed, as many Honourable Ministers highlighted in the panel discussion, nature is a fundamental capital of the tourism industry in many developing countries.

Overall, the world's terrestrial protected areas receive roughly 8 billion visits per year, generating approximately US \$600 billion/y in direct in-country expenditure and US \$250 billion/y in consumer surplus. These figures are much larger than the inadequate spending on conserving parks.²

¹ US National Parks Visitor Spending Effects, 2017

² Balmford A, Green JMH, Anderson M, Beresford J, Huang C, Naidoo R, et al. (2015) Walk on the Wild Side: Estimating the Global Magnitude of Visits to Protected Areas. PLoS Biol 13(2): e1002074.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.1002074>



The Convention on Biological Diversity is an essential part of the global framework for sustainable development; it addresses issues that go well beyond environmental considerations. It is not just an environmental agreement, but a Convention that promotes sustainable development. Tourism is the largest market-based contributor to financing protected areas. In the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Governments have recognized with concern the impact of unsustainable development on the so-called “biodiversity and tourism hotspots”, areas with exceptional biodiversity where tourism is the key development option. Sustainable tourism provides critical livelihoods for indigenous peoples and local communities that are essential stewards of biodiversity. This is why the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted, in 2004, the “Guidelines for Tourism Development in Sensitive Ecosystems”, and our Secretariat has published manuals and guidelines, with partner organizations, and provided capacity-building on the subject.

Furthermore, Ministers of Tourism and Environment at the High-Level Segment of the United Nations Biodiversity Conference in Cancun Mexico in December 2016 adopted the Cancun Declaration on Mainstreaming the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity for Well-Being, with a dedicated section on sustainable tourism. A decision on mainstreaming biodiversity was adopted, with proposals for the development and adoption of policies and programmes, generation of information on impacts on biodiversity of tourism and vice-versa, including with respect to investments, infrastructure, job creation and reinvestment of tourism revenues on biodiversity conservation and ecosystem restoration. In this decision, Parties also agreed to promote communication, education, capacity building and public awareness-raising on biodiversity and tourism development, and requested our Secretariat to work with UNWTO on 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. Over the last years cooperation between the CBD Secretariat and UNWTO has resulted in valuable resources on the mutual impacts and synergies between tourism and biodiversity. But there is a lot more that we can do and ought to do together.

Now it is time to put good ideas to work and, I’d like to suggest a few areas for your consideration:

- We can examine the options to leverage tourism partnerships and concessions in national park systems, as these benefits are still unevenly distributed: out of 8 billion visits to national parks worldwide, 80% are still in North America and Europe – though visitation to parks in developing countries is growing at higher rates than the average. As the Honourable Minister of Uganda said this morning, who knows about all this biodiversity richness in developing countries? Promoting it is very important.
- We can enhance the monitoring and economic measurements of visitation and tourism to protected areas, for better decision-making regarding tourism development;
- We can propose capacity building and flagship or demonstration projects and activities in the “tourism and conservation hotspots”, so that they can generate more and longer-term revenues and jobs while ensuring the conservation of biodiversity as their main asset;
- We can promote the development and use of technologies to transform tourism into a conservation tool for biodiversity.

I would like to invite and challenge all of you to take action to mainstream biodiversity into the tourism industry, both by encouraging a reduction of the tourists’ footprints on biodiversity, but also by investing in nature as an engine for development, growth and business entrepreneurship that provide triple bottom-line benefits and contribute to achieving the SDGs in the long run.

Political leadership and will to act is essential, and it is in your power, Honorable Ministers, to make things happen. From the Biodiversity Convention Secretariat, we are ready to provide expertise, knowledge and a platform to support your efforts to enhance mainstreaming of nature and biodiversity into the tourism sector. We look forward to strengthened cooperation with our colleagues in the UNWTO to make it happen.

Finally, because I like to walk the talk, I am happy to announce that the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity will be launching tomorrow afternoon the Guidelines for Tourism Partnerships and Concessions for Protected Areas: generating sustainable revenues for conservation and development. The guidelines were produced in partnership with UNWTO and IUCN and supported by Germany and the Government of Korea through the Bio-Bridge Initiative. In concluding, let me add my voice to all those who commended the extraordinary leadership and achievements of UNWTO Secretary General Mr. Rifai, and congratulate and welcome the new Secretary General. I look forward to fruitful cooperation between UNWTO and SCBD under the new leadership.

Thank you very much.