



**Statement by the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity,**

**Dr. Cristiana Paşca Palmer**

**at the**

**Tenth meeting of the ad hoc open-ended Working Group on Article 8(j) and related provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity<sup>i</sup>**

**Montreal, Canada,**

**13 December 2017**



Madam Chairperson,  
Distinguished Delegates,

I would like to extend my sincere and heartfelt thanks to the representatives of the Indigenous peoples for blessing our work; as well as for reminding us of the important connection between Nature and Culture.

We would not be honoured with the presence of so many representatives of indigenous peoples and local communities in these meetings, if it were not for the generous contributions of the Governments of Australia, Finland, Germany, Norway and Sweden. I wish to express our deep appreciation to them for contributing to ensure that the voice of indigenous peoples and local communities is heard at this critical phase of the current programme of work for Article 8(j) and Related Provisions.

I would like to take this opportunity to share my post-2020 vision for the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

As you know, we are currently facing an extinction crisis. An extinction crisis of our own making, that makes our collective future uncertain; as ecosystems reach tipping points and teeter on the brink of collapse.

Biodiversity and related ecosystems are the infrastructure that supports all Life on Earth. If we do not take the necessary actions to save biodiversity and use it sustainably, we will not achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and successfully combat climate change.

And make no mistake, these are not separate struggles.

I am committed to leading, together with the Parties to the CBD, a transformative global effort in order to address this crisis.

This requires leadership at all levels and strong partnerships. Political leadership is especially important. It also requires that we work as a team to invert a paradigm that has attempted to address the sixth extinction crisis through top-down decision-making; where those most dependent upon—and knowledgeable about—biodiversity, such as indigenous peoples and local communities, remain the most marginalised.

As we enter into discussions about the process and content of the post-2020 agenda, I challenge Parties to set the bar high in our efforts to save global biodiversity and ensure our future well-being.

We must up-end the mind-set that sees “protecting the environment” and “development” as mutually opposed. There is no need for a trade-off approach. To do this, we must make use of the best knowledge available. By combining traditional knowledge and science, we can find innovative solutions to help steer humanity towards sustainable lifestyles.

Therefore, the post-2020 agenda for the CBD must ensure that the work of the Convention is relevant to—and supportive of—other global arrangements addressing the multiple crises facing humanity.

This is a highly strategic moment for our work with indigenous peoples and local communities. The tenth meeting of the Ad Hoc Open-Ended Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions provides us with an opportunity to consider both the collective contributions made by indigenous peoples and local communities to the current Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, as well as the positioning of indigenous peoples and local communities in the post-2020 agenda.

Accordingly, my first message to you today is one of “**inclusion**”.

Closer to home, the city of Montreal celebrates its 375<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. In a symbolic and powerful act of inclusion the city has adopted a new flag. Montreal's original flag, from 1833, featured symbols that represented Montreal's “founding peoples”<sup>1</sup>- the French, English, Scottish and Irish, represented by a Fleur-de-lys, Rose of Lancaster, Thistle and Shamrock.

On 13 September 2017, as we celebrated the tenth anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Montréal presented its new coat of arms and flag, which now includes another founding people, the first peoples, the indigenous nations on who's traditional territories Montreal was founded. They are represented by a white pine tree in the centre of the red cross.

The white pine, symbolizing indigenous peoples and standing for peace and harmony, now sits at the centre of a circle open at the four compass points, representing the circle of life and the council fire—a place for meeting and dialogue.

Inspired by these acts, at this meeting, I urge Parties, in consideration of Post 2020 Arrangements for the CBD, to unleash the full potential of indigenous peoples and local communities and fully welcome them into the CBD family.

My **second message** for you today is about Nature and Culture, and its importance for the Convention in the post-2020 agenda.

Although indigenous peoples and local communities constitute a relatively small portion, some 370 million people, of the world's 7.6 billion people,<sup>2</sup> these communities represent the largest portion of linguistic and cultural diversity on Earth, and their traditional lands and waters overwhelmingly contain the greatest remaining reserves of biodiversity.

The time has come to fully consider the linkages between biological and cultural diversity – Nature and Culture – if we are to achieve coherence and success in the coming decades.

Reversing current trends of dramatic biodiversity loss and weakening of cultural diversity clearly requires innovative approaches to bridge the artificial divide between biological and cultural diversity in management and policy-making processes.

The time has come to connect the ‘disconnect’ between Nature and Culture.

Consequently, under Item 7, on “Integration”, I look forward to robust discussions on possible elements of a fully integrated post-2020 programme of work for Article 8(j) and related provisions, to help the CBD become more relevant for broader global processes, including the Sustainable Development Goals and climate action.

Madam Chairperson,  
Distinguished Delegates,

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<sup>1</sup> Symbolism - A white pine, representing the ancestral presence of indigenous peoples. A blue Fleur-de-lys, of the Royal House of Bourbon, representing the French, the original settlers of the city (The original coat of arms on which the flag is modelled had a beaver in place of the fleur-de-lys until 1936)

<sup>2</sup> Approximately 7 per cent of the World's population

Indigenous peoples are the protectors of Life on Earth. But, they pay a heavy price for this.

Statistics released in July 2017 by Global Witness revealed that environmental defenders are being killed at a rate of almost four a week. In addition, many, if not most, of the environmental defenders are indigenous peoples, in particular women.<sup>3</sup>

For all those killed, thousands more face threats, attacks, harassment, stigmatization, surveillance and arbitrary arrest. There is, therefore, an immediate need for UN Environment and its family, including the CBD, to position itself against this growing wave of abuse against environmental defenders and the prevailing impunity with which these acts are committed.

The Secretariat is committed to working with UN Environment and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on a policy “Promoting Greater Protection for Environmental Defenders”, as our contribution to addressing this growing crisis.

Additionally, I encourage States to recognize the conservation areas, sacred sites, restoration and *in-situ* conservation efforts by indigenous peoples and local communities, as well as the contribution of their collective actions to ecosystem services, conservation and sustainable development.

Quite simply, the recipe for success is inclusion. The effective participation of indigenous peoples remains central for assessing progress on the ground, and for developing new enhanced arrangements to save and preserve the global diversity of plants and animals for future generations.

Thank you and I wish you every success in the days ahead.

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<sup>1</sup> The Working Group, established in 1998, is a unique mechanism, and its establishment is in recognition of the significance attached by the 196 Parties to the Convention to the effective participation of the custodians of traditional knowledge, indigenous peoples and local communities, as key partners in achieving the three objectives of the Convention.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jul/13/environmental-defenders-being-killed-in-record-numbers-globally-new-research-reveals](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jul/13/environmental-defenders-being-killed-in-record-numbers-globally-new-research-reveals) (Indigenous peoples in the broad sense could encompass indigenous peoples and local communities)