



**MESSAGE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
OF THE
CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
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**on the occasion of
WORLD WILDLIFE DAY
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“Big cats: predators under threat”

Today we celebrate World Wildlife Day. CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) has chosen the theme of “Big cats: predators under threat.” This is an excellent way to capture the attention of the world. Big cats might just be the planet’s most majestic predators. They are an iconic species, widely recognized around the globe, and are both powerful and playful; big cats are most definitely charismatic.

But charisma will only get you so far. Today, big cats, which include not only the lion, tiger, leopard and jaguar, but also cheetah, snow leopard, puma, clouded leopard and others, are facing many threats. Populations of big cats are declining at an alarming rate, due mainly to loss of habitat and prey, conflicts with people, as well as poaching and illegal trade. For example, tiger populations have plummeted by 95 per cent over the past 100 years, while African lion populations have dropped by 40 per cent in just 20 years.

Yet, many people may ask ‘why should I care? How does losing big cats affect me?’ In fact, we should all be concerned. Everything is connected. When we protect animals and plants, we also protect the ecosystems that underlie our economies, our social and cultural traditions and our well-being.

Biodiversity keeps ecosystems functional. Big cats live in a variety of habitats, including forests, tropical rain forests, savannas and mangroves. Ensuring that these ecosystems are as rich and diverse as possible is not only good for them, it’s good for us.

Healthy ecosystems allow us to survive, and provide the foundation for the provision of food, fibre and health. When species become threatened, it is a sign that ecosystems are not functioning properly.



Given its importance for sustainability and human well-being, it is not surprising that biodiversity and healthy ecosystems, including aquatic and terrestrial wildlife and genetic resources, feature prominently in the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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 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.

Most of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets have several elements. For example, Target 12 requires that by 2020 no known threatened species goes extinct and that the conservation status of those species most in decline is improved.

But, as noted in the fourth edition of the *Global Biodiversity Outlook*, while significant progress has been made towards meeting most of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, the overall conclusion is that biodiversity will continue to decline without urgent action.

There is no time to waste. To achieve the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, business-as-usual approaches must be abandoned. Simply put, we need transformational change. This includes a change in behavior at the levels of producers and consumers, governments and businesses that in turn will lead to tangible results on the ground. Biodiversity needs to be mainstreamed into economic and development planning, resource mobilization, governance and decision-making. We need to remember that biodiversity is not a hindrance, but rather a solution for sustainable economic growth and human well-being by supporting the functioning of our Earth's life support system.

Indeed, it is clear that the protection and sustainable use of biodiversity hold the solution for many of our current global challenges. Furthermore, there is a growing recognition and awareness that nature can help provide viable, sustainable and cost-effective solutions to a range of environmental concerns, such as sustainably managing and restoring natural or modified ecosystems.

Nature-based solutions can help meet the objectives of multiple international environmental agreements. For example, with regards to climate change, nature-based solutions include halting or substantially reducing deforestation and other forms of habitat loss and destruction; restoring and rehabilitating degraded ecosystems, and sustainably managing croplands, pastures and coastal ecosystems, such as mangroves, tidal marshes and seagrasses, to ensure soil carbon is kept below ground.

We stand at a critical juncture. What we do next will affect many generations to come.

This year is the 25th anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Since entering into force, the Convention has been implemented through the vision and leadership displayed by countries, non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations, indigenous peoples and local communities, the scientific community and individuals alike.

Over the course of this year, the Parties to the Convention will be celebrating and highlighting their successes in implementing the Convention. These stories, in their entirety, will represent a story of our journey to build a life in harmony with nature.

As human beings we are not separate from the Earth. We are part of the natural systems of this planet. We, like the big cats that we celebrate today, need healthy and diverse ecosystems to ensure a sustainable future for us and for generations to come.