



**STATEMENT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
OF THE**

CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

DR CRISTIANA PAȘCA-PALMER

on the occasion of the meeting of the

**INFORMAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATION, EDUCATION AND
PUBLIC AWARENESS**

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Dear Colleagues,

Welcome back to Montreal. If I remember well, the last time you were here, the city was in the midst of autumn. As you can see and feel, we are in the deepest heat of summer now.

When you were here in October of last year, my message to you was that I place a high value on communication and outreach. I said that one of my top priorities was to raise the profile and political visibility of the Convention on Biological Diversity. And, I said that we all need to do a better job of communicating the critical importance of biodiversity and healthy ecosystems.

It is now nine months later and my priorities remain the same.

I am more convinced than ever that this should be really a big chunk of what we do in the future. We have a lot of ground to cover. It is quite amazing to me, when reaching out to audiences and groups that are not part of our community, how little it is known about the CBD, and how little is understood about biodiversity. I think that part of that has to do with communication barriers, the way we speak about our agenda.

We are at a crucial time for the Convention, and for biodiversity. Governments are already starting their work to develop the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. I have in my notes



here the “ambitious” post-2020 framework, but we’ll have to see how ambitious it is because that is a word that makes some people perhaps nervous, especially when it comes to negotiations. In any case, if we are serious about this agenda, we know that what is needed is a transformative change. And by that we mean not just trying to improve here and there the way we do things, but really going back to the drawing board and really think through properly the way we engage with nature, the way we communicate about nature and how we can have a much greater impact.

This framework that will be adopted at the UN Biodiversity Convention hosted by China in Beijing in 2020 will hopefully provide new impetus to the way we conserve and manage Earth’s natural capital. Strategic communication is part of this process, and building a political coalition in support of this new global biodiversity framework is equally important. However as you well know, strategic communication does not happen overnight. Nor does it happen automatically – we have to make it happen. It requires activities, partners and tools and technologies and collaboration to make it happen.

So what do we need to do? On one hand, we all need our work in convergence on a shared understanding of the methods to scale-up impactful biodiversity communication. We also need to create new narratives. There is a lot of talk on narratives for biodiversity, connecting biodiversity with broader development objectives and broader global challenges. We all need to pitch messages that resonate with, and are meaningful to, both the average person and to decision-makers.

A lot of work has been done in this regard. We are not starting from scratch. Yet, we are speaking to the converted here. The challenge is how do we get those outside this room to understand our lingo? As you may know, I have convened a series of dialogues over this year called the Bogis-Bossey Dialogues on Biodiversity, which are really just informal brainstorming opportunities in order to toss ideas around and to exchange and hear views from other partners. These meetings involved Parties to the Convention and a number of organizations that are part of the work we do. But as I said, we are also trying to reach out to those who are not usually in our circles of expertise or in our community. The dialogues are about the new directions that the Convention needs to go if we are to achieve the goals set in front of us.

Communications was a key element in these dialogues. Some members of this Informal Advisory Group participated in these meetings – Sean Southey and Suds Sarronwala you were part of some of them. Let me reiterate four critical dimensions for communicating biodiversity highlighted in these meetings:

- 1. First, there is the idea of the audience:** If we want to change the trajectory of biodiversity loss, there is more than one audience to communicate with. And for each of these audiences, tailored messages are needed. Consumers need to be engaged in very different ways than we would engage with leaders. It is also important to point out that we need to meet each audience where they are and not where we want them to be.
- 2. This leads us to the question of messages.** Messaging around biodiversity conservation must make the topic simple, personally relevant, and offer meaningful strategies to

activate different individuals based on their skills and capacities. Messages should be conceived as a part of strategies for behavioural change at the individual and institutional level.

3. Third, we have to get the **tone of these messages right**: messages need to connect to people's hearts and to their emotions, and tell a story. Data is obviously absolutely critical, but the way we interpret that to get to people's minds is also important. And not just to reach their minds, but to influence behaviour change. A narrative of optimism is a powerful way to get to this. We can also get to it by showcasing local solutions and avoiding "doom and gloom" communication, which I am the first to say is very hard to avoid these days because every time I open Facebook, which is usually where I get my news in the morning, it is very sad. And by the way, I don't know if you know, I just read this as I was coming here, that the board meeting of the Green Climate Fund didn't go very well in Korea, and that the CEO has just resigned. The work of IUCN's Commission on Education and Communication, and their "Nature for All" campaign is an example, I think, of setting a good tone for the messages.
4. **Fourth, we need to be rigorous**: communication campaigns should be designed with the same rigour as we place in other things, including the way we manage our national parks, but also the way we look at the science. Communication campaigns cannot be accomplished by single actors alone. These must leverage partnerships to increase their reach. In this regard, we need to recognise that to mobilize a global movement, language and communication strategies need to be open source and customizable to unique national and local contexts. The open source campaign of WWF for Connect2Earth, and the World Environment Day are very good examples of how this can be done in a very successful and impactful manner.

There are a lot of pathways to mobilizing society to connect to nature, and all of you gathered here today is part of this solution.

Your work includes mainstreaming environment into education, creating moments where people can fall in love with nature, or building communication campaigns with positive messages.

Through our collective efforts, we can work to support the creation of policies where every politician needs to consider the environment not only as an integral part of any decisions taken, but also as an integral part of their political career. We're not quite there yet.

Your work over these two days needs to provide the basis and foundation for the communications strategy that will not only take us to the UN Biodiversity Conference in Egypt, but beyond to the year 2020 and indeed to the decades that follow. Your work supports the call by governments at the UN Biodiversity Conference in Cancun to implement a global communications strategy.

I call upon you to use this time together to build the strategic foundations for our global communications, of our transformative global communication for biodiversity. I also call upon

you to continue to work together in the months to come and to commit to the concrete actions and steps that will be needed to ensure that these communications plans are implemented.

And I want to end with just one other thought that comes to mind from some of my previous work. This morning I was watching a very interesting TED Talk by an eco-designer who will be moderating a high-level event that we would like to do in New York in two weeks' time for the High-Level Political Forum. And she's talking about creative disruption and cognitive biases - the way we internalize knowledge, the way we form opinions, the way our brains function. It's fascinating to see where neuroscience and behaviour sciences, and behaviour economics, is taking us. I think there will be a lot of insight from these fields to draw into communications and forming people's opinion or influencing people's opinion, in our case, when it comes to nature. I see a lot of value in being creative, being disruptive, challenging our own paradigms, and our own way of thinking and see if there are other ideas out there that can be tested in our agenda and in how we reach the hearts and minds of people.

I wish you a good meeting.
