



**Statement by Ms. Cristiana Pașca Palmer
Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity
At the opening of the first meeting of the
Open-ended Working Group on the Post-2020
Global Biodiversity Framework
Nairobi, August 27, 2019**

Your Excellencies, distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen;

The eminent statesman Nelson Mandela — a leader of Africa and of the world— in 2005 told an audience of youth activists: “Sometimes, it falls upon a generation to be great. You can be that great generation. Let your greatness blossom.”

I cannot think of a more exciting moment as we embark on a process that carries great hope that this new policy will mobilize actions and transformative change that will secure the future of people and the planet.

Dear colleagues, today we meet to formally open discussions on a new global biodiversity framework post-2020.

I would like to recognize all of you in this room, who have been actively involved in our biodiversity journey.

We have come a long way, and it is through your tireless efforts, passion and commitment that we have arrived at this moment.

I would like to thank our Parties, the CBD Bureaux, the Co-Chairs of the post-2020 process, and the many experts and representatives from various organizations who have joined us this week to advance discussions on post-2020.

I can think of no better place than Kenya and Africa — where humanity first emerged from nature — to recommit ourselves to this important work and to acquire inspiration for the road ahead as we journey towards the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, in China next year.

I would also like to thank UNEP, which is hosting us in Nairobi this week, and personally thank Inger and her entire team for the support in organizing the meeting and for the valuable partnership and cooperation we have with UNEP colleagues.

A special and deep felt thank you also goes to the Governments of Austria, Finland, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, as well as to the European Commission, for generously supporting participation at this meeting.

Last, and certainly not least, I would like to give my deep appreciation to my entire team at the CBD Secretariat for their hard work and commitment without which our work would not be possible. I am very proud of you!

Dear friends, it has been close to a year since we last all met at the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in Egypt. In that time, we have much to be proud of.

Together we have increased the depth of the scientific basis of our work.

We have garnered increasing attention and catalysed new action and partnerships from leaders at the highest levels of government, business and civil society.

We have worked to promote biodiversity on the international agenda and we now see that bearing fruit with the increased political attention for biodiversity in major forums, including the G7, the G20 and many others.

We have seen the public in ever greater numbers— led by the world’s youth — call for action to safeguard nature. As we are learning, in China, where our Conference of the Parties will be hosted next year, more and more citizens are aware and engaging in biodiversity actions.

These are all significant achievements — and, yet, much work remains before us to deliver an agreement in 2020 that will ultimately help bend the curve of biodiversity loss and facilitate the achievement of the 2050 Vision of the Convention to Live in Harmony with Nature.

Your presence at this first Open-Ended Working Group meeting signals your commitment to this transparent, participatory and inclusive process. We have a total of 315 participants here — 199 government representatives from 99 countries, and 116 partner organizations and representatives of non-governmental organizations, intergovernmental organizations, the private sector, indigenous peoples and local communities, youth, education and the United Nations.

Luckily, thanks to the work of so many of our colleagues in this room and beyond, we know solutions do exist to the challenge of the biodiversity crisis. Many of these solutions have been outlined in recent landmark reports.

For example, the IPBES *Global Assessment* outlines “five main interventions (“levers”) that can generate transformative change by tackling the underlying indirect drivers of nature deterioration: (1) incentives and capacity-building; (2) cross-sectoral cooperation; (3) pre-emptive action; (4) decision-making in the context of resilience and uncertainty; and (5) environmental law and implementation.”

The IPBES report also wisely noted that “By its very nature, transformative change can expect opposition from those with interests vested in the status quo, but such opposition can be overcome for the broader public good.”

As experts in the field, you know that there is no time to waste and that the costs of inaction only keep rising.

As the OECD *Biodiversity: Finance and the Economic and Business Case for Action* report documented, “Between 1997 and 2011, the world lost an estimated US\$ 4-20 trillion per year in ecosystem services owing to land-cover change and US\$ 6-11 trillion per year from land degradation.”

This rising toll disproportionately impacts already marginalized communities who depend directly on nature for their livelihoods and ways of life — even as it affects the entire global community with dramatic spillover costs to our health and well-being, food and water security, and social stability.

The global public, for its part, senses the biodiversity crisis both in their own lives and communities. They also increasingly see widespread ecological catastrophes — such as the burning of the world’s great forests — as an affront to their values and future.

So, this first meeting of the Open-Ended Working Group carries an enormous responsibility.

I know you have many difficult decisions ahead of you, and I know that you must rightly further organize the process to developing an agreement.

I also want to urge you not to lose sight of our ultimate goal of securing an ambitious and effective framework that achieves our common objectives.

I believe that you have a very strong base to build upon.

Since the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, the CBD Secretariat has organized a series of multi-stakeholder regional consultations as well as thematic consultations that have already surfaced many critical issues.

Further consultations have been organized by partners in Trondheim, Bern and many other venues.

Just this past weekend, our related Protocols held positive consultations here in Nairobi.

Our agenda, moreover, can further encourage synergies and integration with the other biodiversity and Rio conventions — just as our agenda can become fully aligned with other critical global agendas, including the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and other global priorities.

Dear delegates, as you agreed at the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, this will be a Party-led process that will be based on science, the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples and local communities, and the experience of all Parties in implementing the Convention to date.

I know that, with the expertise and experience as well as the diverse representation at this meeting, we can together further drive this imperative agenda.

Together with, my team at the secretariat, I look forward to working with you and to supporting you in the year ahead to arrive at a landmark and successful fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

The world may not ever know our individual names. It may not know the details of our process or of the tireless work that you all undertake: the many long nights, the difficult technical and scientific issues, the inevitable political, bureaucratic and budgetary battles.

But the world will surely know the results of what we do together.

So, I encourage you to be bold, to be brave, to work together, and to lead us all to a better future.

Paraphrasing Nelson Mandela, I say “as a community, now is the time to let our greatness blossom”.

Thank you.
