



Opening statement

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Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,
Representatives of the world's indigenous peoples and local communities,

Welcome, bienvenus, bienvenidos y bienvenidas, to Montreal.

First, I would like to extend my deep appreciation to the Elders of the local Mohawk community Kanien'kehá:ka ("People of the Flint"),¹ Mr. Kenneth Deer and Mr. Charles Patton, for providing a traditional welcome and for sharing with us their rich cultural heritage, which is deeply rooted in this land we are gathered upon.

As is the custom of indigenous peoples, I understand and really like that it has become the practice to open meetings of the Working Group by respectfully acknowledging the traditional peoples of this territory and their ancestors.

I also want to applaud the Mohawk for their continuing efforts to reintroduce and reinvigorate their traditional languages through culturally appropriate education, which strengthens intergenerational transfer of traditional knowledge. Mr. Patton is a Mohawk teacher, and he has devoted much of his life to restoration of language and knowledge. As you are aware, status and trends in traditional languages is one of the four adopted indicators for traditional knowledge and Aichi Target 18, and 2019 is the International Year of Indigenous Languages.

The words of the Traditional Welcome call upon the Maple (the greatest of the trees), the four Winds, the Waters, the Earth, Grandmother Moon and all living things to help us in the work ahead, to unblock our ears and help us to listen deeply to one another, in order to find, through consensus, a way forward. This serves as a timely reminder that we all have much to gain from recognizing convergences rather than focusing on differences and thus provides us with some practical advice about the way forward.

While reflecting on the Mohawk Welcome and the focus of the meeting before us, which is traditional knowledge, I recall the words of Pope Francis, who, in his Encyclical "On Care for Our Common Home", called for respect to be shown for "the various cultural riches of different peoples, their art and poetry, their interior life and spirituality" and advised that, "if we are truly concerned to develop an ecology capable of remedying the damage we have done, no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out".

¹ Mohawk, self-named Kanien'kehá:ka ("People of the Flint"), are an Iroquoian-speaking North American Indian tribe and the easternmost tribe of the Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) Confederacy. The local indigenous community closest to Montreal is Kahnawake.



Traditional knowledge is key to understanding nature.

Distinguished delegates,

It is fitting that our meeting coincides with the end of the harvest in North America. It reminds us of the benefits that nature's biodiversity so generously bestows upon us year after year. In return, it is our duty to respect nature, cherish and preserve its diversity and ensure that its benefits are shared fairly and equitably among us all, especially the most vulnerable, and including generations to come.

May all our hearts and minds be brought together as one and be aligned with nature so that we may find a way forward in the days to come.

I am pleased that we have good numbers of indigenous peoples and local communities with us for these important discussions concerning future work and institutional arrangements in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. I take this opportunity to thank the Governments of Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and Spain for their generous support of the participation in this meeting of many representatives from developing countries and Parties with economies in transition, as well as representatives of indigenous peoples and local communities.

The recent IPBES *Global Assessment* report emphasizes that nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history — and the rate of species extinctions is accelerating, with grave impacts on people around the world now likely. The health of ecosystems on which we and all other species depend is deteriorating more rapidly than ever. We are eroding the very foundations of our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide.

The IPBES *Global Assessment* also reminds us that the traditional territories of indigenous peoples and local communities are the last bastions of biological, and cultural, diversity in a sea of degraded ecosystems.

Much of the world's terrestrial wild and domesticated biodiversity lies in areas traditionally managed, owned, used or occupied by indigenous peoples and local communities. Indeed, over a quarter of global land area is under such management, 35 per cent of it being formally protected and 35 per cent of the remaining areas being terrestrial areas with very low human intervention.

These main messages are important for the work before us. As we enter discussions related to the process and content of the post-2020 agenda, and specifically future work of relevance to indigenous peoples and local communities, I challenge participants to set the bar high in our efforts to save global biodiversity.

Listen to the indigenous peoples and local communities in their ambition to be “partners” in the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and thus in the development of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

If we are to achieve by 2050 the Convention's vision of “Living in harmony with nature”, we must harness the power of the collection and local actions of the world's indigenous peoples and local communities.

That is why the post-2020 agenda for the Convention must ensure that indigenous peoples and local communities are valued partners in the global arrangements to address biodiversity loss, and why this week's meeting has such strategic potential and historical significance.

I particularly enjoyed hearing the contributions of representatives of indigenous peoples and local communities, who discussed issues relevant to the post-2020 process during the Global Thematic Dialogue for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, held on 17 and 18 November 2019 with the generous support of the Government of Canada.

As we move towards a fully inclusive post-2020 global biodiversity framework, the Convention on Biological Diversity is entering a new era in our relationship with indigenous peoples and local communities.

I wish you every success as the Working Group considers its future work, new working methods and an exciting vision of a sustainable future.

A great era of change and solidarity is upon us. May this meeting serve as a crucial milestone in this process.

Thank you.
