



**STATEMENT BY MS. ELIZABETH MARUMA MREMA**

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**AT THE SPECIAL VIRTUAL SESSION FOR SBSTTA-24 AND SBI-03 ON BIODIVERSITY, ONE HEALTH AND THE RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

**ONLINE, 15 DECEMBER 2020**

Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Colleagues,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to today's special virtual session on biodiversity, One Health and the response to COVID-19, in which we are using an updated version of this virtual platform, hoping to improve your experience. This special session demonstrates your support in keeping momentum as we embark on an ambitious journey to Kunming.

Let me start by expressing my sympathy and solidarity with all of you, especially those who have lost loved ones or suffered hardship from the impacts of this pandemic.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are living in extraordinary times, experiencing interlocking crises of biodiversity loss, environmental degradation and climate change, compounded by a health crisis that has transformed our world. But, out of these unprecedented challenges, an opportunity to rebuild our relationship with nature is born. There is a tremendous opportunity before us to ensure that the protection and sustainable use of biodiversity is integrated into policies that will guide the post-pandemic economic and development recovery plans.

As we will hear from the presentations this morning, scientific evidence indicates that the underlying causes of pandemics are the same global environmental changes that drive biodiversity loss and climate change. The links between pandemic risk and biodiversity add further weight to the rationale for addressing the drivers of biodiversity loss to prevent or reduce risk of future pandemics.

While it might seem daunting, options to address and minimize these risks not only exist but are within our grasp as we work towards the development of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, to be adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention at its fifteenth meeting, and its implementation in the coming years.

Let me highlight a number of issues to consider in this context, for example: (a) integrating human health considerations into land use planning; (b) improving regulation and management of the harvest, transport and use of wildlife, to make it safe -- from a human health perspective -- as well as legal and sustainable; (d) reforming and transforming our food and agricultural systems, particularly the management of livestock; and (e) promoting responsible consumption.

Recognizing and addressing the linkages between the management of biodiversity and pandemic risk should be part of a broader One Health approach. As set out in the *Global Biodiversity Outlook*, the One Health approach is an inclusive, transdisciplinary and cross-sectoral approach that recognizes the intrinsic connection between human health, animal health and the health and resilience of nature.

Reducing disease risk through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity is also highly cost-effective. Pandemics and emerging zoonoses cause widespread human suffering and trillions of dollars in economic damages; strategies to prevent pandemics by reducing biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation and limiting the wildlife trade would cost ten or a hundred times less. This provides a strong economic incentive for transformative change to reduce the risk of pandemics.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are standing at a crossroads. The way we steer our recovery out of this pandemic will either lock us into a “business as usual” unsustainable path or enable our societies to rebuild our relationship with nature and unlock its potential. It is within us all to take actions for a world in which every person has dignity and prosperity and can live in harmony with nature.

I thank you.

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