

**STATEMENT BY ELIZABETH MARUMA MREMA**

**Executive Secretary, CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

**on the occasion of**

**INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FORESTS**

*"Forest restoration: a path to recovery and well-being"*

The year 2021 marks the start of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, a decade where forests, which harbour 80 per cent of the world's biodiversity, will play a crucial role.

The world is still reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic. Societies and economies need to confront huge challenges, such as putting our economies back on track, reducing poverty and inequalities, while addressing the impending climate and biodiversity crisis.

Forest restoration provides a common answer to all these issues. It can generate employment, benefit livelihoods, provide habitat for threatened species, sequester carbon and mitigate the effects of climate change. Restoring 350 million hectares of degraded land between now and 2030 could remove 13 to 26 gigatons of greenhouse gases out of the atmosphere and generate ecosystem services valued at \$9 trillion.

This past decade has seen remarkable progress in actions to conserve and restore biodiversity and promote its sustainable use. However, these efforts are still widely insufficient to "bend the curve" of biodiversity loss, especially in forest ecosystems.

Forest habitat fragmentation and encroachment promotes new interfaces between humans as well as domestic and wild animals which can lead to the emergence of communicable diseases like COVID-19. By protecting and restoring forests, we guard ourselves against new viruses that could be transmitted to humans.

The pandemic has also created an unprecedented economic crisis, that reinforces inequalities by disproportionately affecting the poorest and most vulnerable populations. The World Bank estimates that up to 150 million people could be pushed into extreme poverty this year. Forest ecosystems deliver goods and services across seasons and years that support the livelihoods of 1.6 billion people - a crucial safety net for local populations in times of hardship. For this reason, we must also ensure that land rights of indigenous and forest-dependent populations are secured and forest resources sustainably managed.

The sustainable use of biodiversity needs to be part of the blueprint for 'Building Back Better'. Global recovery programs must have strong environmental safeguards in place and make full use of the opportunities in the forest sector to reset economies on a greener track.

These solutions will need to be deployed at scale, including in post-pandemic recovery packages, policies and financial mechanisms. This will give us a head start on the goals of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and stabilize or reverse trends of biodiversity loss over the next 10 years. This will allow for the recovery of natural ecosystems in the following 20 years, with improvements by 2050 to achieve the UN Vision of "living in harmony with nature".

As we celebrate the 2021 International Day of Forests, we need all stakeholders to work together to make this year a critical turning point in our path towards a world where forests are fully recognized for their importance and true value to human wellbeing.