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EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
2021 UNITED NATIONS BIODIVERSITY CONFERENCE

Opening statement

“Ecological Civilization — Building a Shared Future for All Life on Earth”
Kunming, China
11 October 2021 (15:00-18:00)

H.E. Mr. Han Zheng, Vice-Premier of the State Council and Politburo Standing Committee member of the Chinese Communist Party,
H.E. Mr. Huang Runqiu, Minister of Ecology and Environment of China, COP 15 President
H.E. Ms. Yasmine Fouad, Minister of Environment of Egypt,
Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to the opening of the United Nations Biodiversity Conference.

This Conference includes the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol, and the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol.

After a year of considerable hardships and tremendous effort on the part of many committed, hardworking people, today, we mark an important achievement. We initiate the first part of our UN Biodiversity Conference in the city of Kunming, Yunnan Province.

Our determination to continue from the last meeting of the Conference of the Parties, in Sharm El-Sheikh to our activities today, in Kunming, was driven by the extraordinary guidance of Her Excellency Ms. Yasmine Fouad, Minister of Environment of Egypt and COP 14 President, together with her committed team.

Equally important was the unwavering dedication, cooperation and political impetus of the Government of China, steered by H.E. Mr. Huang Runqiu, Minister of Ecology and Environment of China, now elected COP 15 President, and his COP 15 Executive Committee.

The COP 14 and COP 15 Presidencies have been assisted by a strong and dedicated Bureau. The Bureau has been at the helm providing firm guidance towards our collective mission. Let me also acknowledge my staff for their hard work and steadfast resolve during this intense period since COP 14.

Distinguished delegates,

Holding this important conference on biodiversity in one of the world’s most culturally and ecologically diverse locations denotes the deep value that nature and the linkage between nature and culture have for us.

Our hosts have our great respect for choosing this part of China for our meeting. China’s work over the last several decades represents a model of transformation — from actions to reduce pollution, restore

degraded lands, and conserve species and ecosystems, to tackling poverty and pursuing broader human development goals.

I would like to express my admiration for the actions that China has taken to protect and restore biodiversity, and extend my appreciation to H.E. Mr. Han Zheng, Vice Premier, for his insightful opening speech.

I am also deeply encouraged to see that the engagement of many non-State actors is rising considerably in China and worldwide.

Now more than ever, we are witnessing a deep shift of awareness of the interconnected biodiversity, climate and health emergencies that we face. The COVID-19 pandemic is a stark reminder of the connection between human health, the health of species and our ecosystems.

Safeguarding life on Earth is a truly global issue — one that affects all of humanity and, indeed, all species on this one small planet that we all call home.

Distinguished delegates,

Since the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, the road to Kunming has proven challenging and longer than any of us could have foreseen.

In 2020, we reached a sober assessment of the progress under the 2011-2020 Strategic Plan for Biodiversity with the release of the fifth edition of the *Global Biodiversity Outlook*.

This assessment of our efforts showed that, while there have been some successes and progress, they have not been the breakthroughs needed to halt the ongoing loss of plant and animal diversity on Earth. Nor have we been able to secure the advances needed to safeguard many essential ecosystem services that are key for our well-being.

We are facing our moment of truth.

If we are to meet the 2050 Vision of Living in harmony with nature, we must take actions this decade to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and put biodiversity on a path to recovery by 2030 at the latest.

This is the defining challenge of our time.

The task before us is to develop and adopt the post-2020 global biodiversity framework that meets this challenge.

Over the past several years, we have witnessed increased awareness among people, and especially among our youth, of the need to confront the biodiversity crises alongside the climate crisis. Our leaders have made some bold commitments in response to the urgency of the need for action.

Now, we must translate these commitments into policies, actions and results.

I encourage you and us all to work together to help shape and deliver a bold, inclusive and ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework. A universal framework that drives us forward to catalyse the changes needed to reach our 2030 targets and the longer-term Vision of Living in harmony with nature by 2050.

Together, we can work towards an ecological civilization, building a shared future for all life on Earth.

Thank you. I wish you all constructive deliberations.
