

Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity

Opening statement

Ecological Civilization Forum

Kunming, China

14 October 2021

Excellencies,

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, President of the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties,

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to join this important forum on ecological civilization – a practice born here, in China, attaching specific goals and actions to create a systemic shift towards an ecologically centred pathway for sustainable development. Today, we gather as a global community to learn from China’s experiences and achievements in transforming a new model of development, based on the ideas of practicality, environmental protection and sustainability.

Throughout this week, we have had opportunities to connect to the theme of COP 15 and take part in ecological civilization by working together to build a shared future for all life on Earth.

My deep thanks to H.E. Mr. Huang Runqiu, Minister of Ecology and Environment of China, and all the organizations contributing to this Forum, for presenting salient examples of eco-civilization. The discussions will include measures that instil long-term planning without neglecting immediate needs, mainstreaming biodiversity across all sectors of government and society, identifying investment opportunities for biodiversity, and fostering a culture of sharing, responsibility and cooperation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Biodiversity is at the centre of the biggest issues the world faces. It is fundamental to climate change mitigation and adaptation, health, food and water security, poverty eradication and sustainable development. Conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity are recognized pillars of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, contributing to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and the Convention’s 2050 Vision of “living in harmony with nature”. How we collectively address the biodiversity crisis will clearly determine our future.

Despite encouraging advances made under the Convention, a combination of policy measures, actions and incentives are urgently needed to address the current and persistent drivers exacerbating biodiversity loss. This requires ensuring that the benefits of biodiversity are shared fairly and equitably, and that the needs and rights of indigenous peoples and local communities are respected, making full use of their knowledge, experience and capabilities. We also need to be certain that the necessary resources and tools are mobilized to put biodiversity on a path to recovery.

The fifth edition of the *Global Biodiversity Outlook* indicates that immediate, transformative, and holistic changes are required, encompassing economic, social, political and technological factors in eight areas: land and forest transformation; sustainable fisheries and oceans transformation; sustainable freshwater transformation; sustainable agriculture transformation; sustainable food systems transformation; sustainable climate action transformation; urban and infrastructure transformation; and the “One Health Approach”.

Global green recovery plans and new mitigation commitments have also created opportunities for the acceleration of these transformational efforts. Identifying and disclosing financial dependencies and impacts on nature, and associated risks, are also key to enable the necessary transitions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The themes of this Forum prompt us to think collectively – and apply locally. We gain a visual reality of what we stand to lose and what a collapse in our ecosystem services would imply, putting at risk many countries’ prospects to shift out of poverty and jeopardizing hundreds of millions of people that rely on nature for food, jobs and protection, and so much more.

We all recognize that an ambitious and coordinated policy response on biodiversity is urgently needed. On one hand, to stabilize the rate of loss and trigger recovery on terrestrial and marine ecosystems, by the end of this decade, and, on the other, to enable the continued benefits from natural ecosystems in an economy that values biodiversity as a core component of sustainability.

This is critical in specific sectors that depend on biodiversity. This includes forestry, fisheries, energy, tourism, health, and agriculture, which are also critical sectors for mitigation and adaptation of climate change, securing water, fuel, timber and food supply, and preventing risks from future pandemics.

Therefore, I cannot stress this enough — *Putting biodiversity on a path to recovery is the defining challenge of this decade.*

In reaching the Vision of living in harmony with nature by 2050, we must look at global and domestic leadership for integrated, ambitious and forward-looking solutions that convey a future path where biodiversity conservation and sustainable development are indivisible.

We must bring nature into decision-making at all levels and account for it as a long-term sustainability priority. This is critical to improve our collective responsibility to efficiently use and provide access to the goods and services biodiversity provides, while allowing it to regenerate so that such goods and services may be sustained or enhanced over time.

The anticipated post-2020 global biodiversity framework will provide our blueprint for action. We must usher in this opportunity and be bold and ambitious.

I encourage you to use the experience and wisdom shared at this Forum to help find solutions that address the multiple values we attach to biodiversity and to inspire a catalytic and inclusive movement across all sectors of society.

As the journey continues to the second part of COP 15, in 2022, we must strive to build common ground on the direction we must take together.

I thank you for your attention.

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