

Opening Statement by the Acting Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, David Cooper, at the twelfth meeting of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Intersessional Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity

12 November 2023

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

I extend a warm welcome to Geneva, as we gather from different corners of the world.

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to Kenneth Deer of the Mohawk Nation for his traditional blessing for our work.

I would also like to thank the many donors that have made this meeting possible, namely, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Finland, Germany, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland, the Republic of Korea, Japan and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Distinguished delegates,

This Working Group has served us as a forum for a rich cultural exchange for more than 20 years. Its achievements have been significant.

I will not list them all here; suffice to say the Working Group has raised the profile of indigenous peoples and local communities as essential partners in our work, especially as on-the-ground partners in its implementation.

We have reached a pivotal moment, not just in the life of the Working Group, but also in the relationship between the Convention and indigenous peoples and local communities.

The interrelated crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and the degradation of lands and waters are threatening the health of the planet and undermining the health of people.

Relying on nature for their everyday needs, indigenous peoples and local communities are among the most directly affected by these crises, but they are also at the forefront of defending the environment and protecting Mother Earth.

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework is a key milestone, as it clearly acknowledges the important roles and contributions of indigenous peoples and local communities as custodians of biodiversity and as partners in its conservation, restoration and sustainable use.

The Framework also recognizes and considers diverse value systems and concepts, including those that recognize the rights of nature and of Mother Earth.

Recognizing the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is crucial to the Framework, underscoring that biodiversity is essential for supporting life on Earth.

The implementation of the Framework must ensure that the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities are respected.

Building on its substantial achievements over two decades, participants in this meeting will consider both the new programme of work for Article 8(j) and other provisions of the Convention, and new institutional arrangements, to facilitate the inclusive implementation of the Framework towards our vision of living in harmony with nature.

It is poignant to recall that the traditional territories of indigenous peoples and local communities continue to safeguard lands and waters that remain significantly less degraded than much of the rest of the world.

These territories are the last refuge of a considerable portion of our planet's remaining biodiversity, as well as cultural and linguistic diversity.

The intimate interwoven relationship between these communities and nature reminds us of our shared responsibility towards biodiversity, nature and one another.

Distinguished colleagues,

The task before us is of paramount importance if we are to implement the ambitious objectives outlined in the Framework for the benefit of nature and people.

As countries update their national biodiversity strategies and action plans and align national targets with the Framework, let us remember that there are no better partners than indigenous peoples and local communities.

They hold considerable traditional knowledge and contemporary experience relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

Although the Working Group has effectively contributed to raising the profile of indigenous peoples and local communities and the value of their traditional knowledge in our work, I am convinced that we can collectively do more to tap into the power of traditional knowledge and local action to reach our goals.

This is a new opportunity, and we must seize this moment to do so. I hope that you may keep this in mind in your deliberations this week.

I trust that the work before you will be a catalyst for unity, transcending the polarization that has enveloped so much of our world.

Let us build consensus and pave the way forward.

I am pleased to report that indigenous peoples and local communities, women and young people have already started work.

An international dialogue held just before this meeting has allowed them to prepare their thoughts and to start an informal dialogue with Parties and other partners on some of the topics that will be addressed under the various agenda items of the meeting.

Let us be ambitious.

I trust that we can find consensus and I hope that the Working Group can send a clean recommendation on the proposed new programme of work to the Conference of the Parties for its sixteenth meeting.

This would send a positive and strong signal and be a catalyst for our ongoing efforts to align all the programmes of work with the Framework, to support its implementation.

We have an exciting agenda ahead of us, and I extend my best wishes to the Working Group for a successful week ahead.

I thank you.
