

**Statement by the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity,  
Astrid Schomaker, at the opening of the first meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Article 8(j)  
and Other Provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity Related to Indigenous Peoples  
and Local Communities**

Panama City  
27 October 2025

Before I begin my opening remarks, I would like to take a moment to express our solidarity with the people of Haiti and Jamaica, and to one of our Bureau members, who are being affected by severe and devastating weather conditions linked to Hurricane Melissa. Our thoughts are with you and your families.

Your Excellency, Irene Vélez Torres, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development and President of the sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention,

Your Excellency, Juan Carlos Navarro, Minister of Environment of Panama,

Distinguished delegates, representatives of indigenous peoples and local communities, I warmly welcome you all to this inaugural meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Article 8(j) and Other Provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity Related to Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities.

I thank you, Briseida Iglesias, of the Guna indigenous peoples of Panama, for the indigenous opening of our gathering today, and the Uskalu Group for the Mugan Boe dance.

First, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the presidency of the sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties for its leadership. Last year in Cali, Colombia delivered a memorable “COP de la Gente” and went the extra mile to complete the work in Rome.

The sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties fulfilled its promise to the world, adopting historic decisions, including on the implementation of Article 8(j), which gave birth to this very Subsidiary Body.

I would be remiss not to thank our generous host, the Government of Panama.

Thanks to Panamanian hospitality, we are able to gather here in person from all corners of the world for two meetings that constitute important milestones on the road to the seventeenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, in Armenia.

I also wish to acknowledge with deep appreciation the donor countries, the financial contributions of which have made it possible for delegates from developing countries to participate in this meeting.

I would like to thank the Governments of Australia, Finland, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland for their generous contributions to the Voluntary Trust Fund for Facilitating the Participation of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, which has enabled the participation of 14 representatives of indigenous peoples and local communities in this important meeting, where their voices must be heard on matters that concern them the most.

I also appreciate the efforts of indigenous peoples and local communities themselves to raise funds to enable participation. I also reiterate your call to donors, including new donors, to step forward to support these efforts to enable your participation.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates and representatives of indigenous peoples and local communities,

We have truly reached a watershed moment in the journey of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

For the first time since the inception of the Convention, a permanent subsidiary body has been established to specifically address issues of direct relevance to indigenous peoples and local communities.

This is an eloquent expression of the Parties' recognition of their unique role and contributions as custodians of biodiversity.

And I want to acknowledge the hard work of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Intersessional Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity. It has been a long time coming: 20 years. Its efforts have made the establishment of this subsidiary body possible.

For more than 20 years, the Working Group has actively promoted the recognition of indigenous peoples and local communities, and of their traditional knowledge.

As requested in the decision to establish the Subsidiary Body on Article 8(j), one of our initial tasks is to further develop the modus operandi of the Subsidiary Body for consideration at the seventeenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, next year.

This discussion will outline the operational procedures of the Subsidiary Body, ensuring the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples and local communities.

When the Conference of the Parties adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, just under three years ago, at its fifteenth meeting, it acknowledged the vital roles and contributions of indigenous peoples and local communities as custodians of biodiversity and as partners in its conservation, restoration and sustainable use, on our pathway towards living in harmony with nature.

The present meeting will be a measure of success.

Then, at its sixteenth meeting, the Conference of Parties adopted a new programme of work on Article 8(j) and other provisions of the Convention related to indigenous peoples and local communities to 2030, setting out specific tasks to ensure the meaningful contribution of indigenous peoples and local communities to the implementation of the Framework.

At the present meeting, we will aim to advance three tasks outlined in the programme, namely, developing guidelines to support the conservation, protection and restoration of biological diversity, under Tasks 1.1 and 1.2, and developing a process to review and update the Voluntary Glossary of Key Terms and Concepts Within the Context of Article 8(j), under Task 5.4.

I would like to stress the importance of the task before us.

We must seize this historic moment to translate Article 8(j) and related provisions into an effective elevation of the role of indigenous peoples and local communities in the work conducted under the Convention.

Success here in Panama City this week means that, in a year from now, we can go to the seventeenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, in Yerevan, ready for further progress.

In doing so, we should collectively ensure that the recommendations of this Subsidiary Body to the Conference of the Parties for its seventeenth meeting are clear, actionable and conducive to the accelerated implementation of the Framework.

May the spirit of solidarity and collaboration that has brought us here endure.

May it guide us through these deliberations, so that the voices of indigenous peoples and local populations can be fully integrated into our efforts to accelerate the implementation of the Framework.

Thank you.