

**Message of CITES Secretary-General Ivonne Higuero
for International Day for Biological Diversity**

22 May 2019

International Day for Biological Diversity is a day to celebrate all the forms of life with which we share this planet. It is also an opportunity to raise awareness of the value of biodiversity for humankind.

This year's theme, "Our Biodiversity, Our Food, Our Health", underscores the extraordinary benefits that are derived from biodiversity that provide for our very existence. Food and medicine are among the most common use of the over 36,000 species of wild plants and animals that are protected by CITES through the regulation of international trade.

CITES contributes to the conservation of biodiversity by overseeing a regulatory framework that provides for measures to ensure that international trade in listed species does not threaten their survival in the wild. This is an essential service to maintain the species concerned throughout its range at a level that sustains its role in the ecosystems in which it exists.

The IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, which was launched on 6 May, warns us of the unprecedented decline in nature. It concludes that the proportion of species currently threatened with extinction averages some 25% across the many terrestrial, freshwater and marine vertebrates, invertebrates and plants. Nearly one million species risk becoming extinct within decades if radical actions are not taken.

Reversing this trend will require transformative changes based on innovative as well as tried and true solutions. The good news is that biodiversity can be conserved, restored and used sustainably while meeting global societal goals by investing in proven solutions and committing to transformative change.

The findings of the Global Assessment Report also underline why the work of CITES is so essential for the future of both wildlife and humanity. By ensuring that wild plants and animals are not overexploited through unsustainable trade, CITES makes a practical and effective contribution to conserving biodiversity, ecosystem products and services. At the same time, our work on the sustainable use of wild plants and animals and the engagement of local communities helps to reduce poverty and strengthen livelihoods while conserving biological diversity.

International Day for Biological Diversity was established to commemorate the adoption of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 1992. CBD has adopted a Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 – a flexible framework that is relevant to all biodiversity-related conventions, including CITES. A new universal biodiversity framework for the post-2020 period is now under discussion and CITES will fully engage in its elaboration.

Safeguarding biodiversity is one of the key elements of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As we prepare to move into the post-2020 CITES Strategic Vision, CITES Parties will make greater efforts to protect our common heritage for this and future generations. With the political will of the world's governments, we can conserve life on earth and biodiversity.

