



THE PRESIDENT  
OF THE  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

24 July 2020

Excellency,

I have pleasure to circulate herewith the concept note for the Summit on Biodiversity mandated by General Assembly resolutions 73/234 and 74/221. In accordance with General Assembly decision 74/562, the Summit will take place on Wednesday, 30 September 2020.

The Summit on Biodiversity is being convened under the theme “Urgent Action on Biodiversity for Sustainable Development” and will highlight the urgency of action at the highest levels in support of a post-2020 global biodiversity framework that contributes to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and places the global community on a path towards realizing the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity, “*Living in harmony with nature*”.

A detailed programme and logistics note for the Summit on Biodiversity will be provided in due course. For further information, kindly contact Ms. Toni-Shae Freckleton, email: [toni-shae.freckleton@un.org](mailto:toni-shae.freckleton@un.org); Ms. Nehali Anupriya, email: [nehali.anupriya@un.org](mailto:nehali.anupriya@un.org), and Mr. Mohammed Shaker, email: [mohammed.shaker@un.org](mailto:mohammed.shaker@un.org).

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive script.

Tijanni Muhammad Bande

All Permanent Representatives and  
Permanent Observers to the United Nations  
New York

# United Nations Summit on Biodiversity

## 30 September 2020, New York

### Introduction

The United Nations Summit on Biodiversity will be convened by the President of the General Assembly on 30 September 2020, at the level of Heads of State and Government under the theme of “*Urgent action on biodiversity for sustainable development.*”<sup>1</sup>

Our societies are intimately linked with and depend on biodiversity. Biodiversity is essential for people, including through its provision of nutritious food, clean water, medicines, and protection from extreme events. Biodiversity loss and the degradation of its contributions to people jeopardize progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and human wellbeing. The evidence of these connections is clear.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the importance of the relationship between people and nature. We are reminded that when we destroy and degrade biodiversity, we undermine the web of life and increase the risk of disease spillover from wildlife to people. Responses to the pandemic provide a unique opportunity for transformative change as a global community. An investment in the health of our planet is an investment in our own future.

The Summit will highlight the crisis facing humanity from the degradation of biodiversity and the urgent need to accelerate action on biodiversity for sustainable development. It will provide an opportunity for Heads of State and Government and other leaders to raise ambition for the development of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework to be adopted at the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2021. This framework, and its effective implementation, must put nature on a path to recovery by 2030 to meet the SDGs and realize the Vision of “Living in harmony with nature”.

As we approach the end of the UN Decade on Biodiversity 2011-2020, progress towards global biodiversity targets including those of the SDGs has been insufficient. While there are many local examples of success, biodiversity is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history, with growing impacts on people and our planet.

Recent assessments by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) concluded that species extinction rates are tens to hundreds of times higher now than historical averages, that 75% of the Earth’s land surface has been significantly altered by human actions, including for example the loss of 85% of the area of wetlands; and that 66% of the ocean area is experiencing multiple impacts from people, including from fisheries, pollution, and chemical changes from acidification.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Biodiversity Summit is convened in response to CBD Conference of the Parties Decision 14/34 and UNGA Resolutions 73/234 and 74/269, which determined the scope, modalities, format and organization of the summit.

<sup>2</sup> Various scientific and technical resources are available providing additional details in support of this concept note. These include the assessment reports of IPBES [www.ipbes.net](http://www.ipbes.net) and the Global Sustainable Development Report 2019 [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/24797GSDR\\_report\\_2019.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/24797GSDR_report_2019.pdf)

The 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations, the start of the UN decade of action and delivery on SDGs, and the UN Decades on ecosystem restoration and on ocean science for sustainable development, among others, provide additional context for the Summit. Together, they remind us of the urgent need to recognize our dependence on a healthy planet and to work together for transformative change.

The Summit is an opportunity to demonstrate leadership and commitment to improve our relationship with nature, addressing the causes of change, and ensuring that biodiversity and the contributions it provides to all people are at the heart of sustainable development and the fight against climate change.

## **Plenary: Urgent Action on Biodiversity for Sustainable Development**

### ***Objective***

The opening segment and the plenary session will highlight the connections between biodiversity, societies and economies. It is anticipated that Heads of State and Government and other leaders will recognize biodiversity's multiple and essential contributions to sustainable development, and will demonstrate ambition and commitment to accelerate action on biodiversity for sustainable development, for example through whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches and investments to restore, sustainably use, conserve and equitably share benefits from biodiversity.

### ***Key issues***

**Addressing the loss of biodiversity is essential for poverty eradication, sustainable jobs, economic development and meeting the SDGs.** The conservation, sustainable use and equitable sharing of benefits from biodiversity underpin the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Humanity's dependence on biodiversity is widely recognized and nature is critical for the delivery and success of 14 of the 17 SDGs, including those that relate to food security, health, livelihoods, jobs, water security, the ocean, climate change, and disaster prevention. More than half of the world's GDP is moderately or highly dependent on nature, through the contributions of nature to people such as pollination, water quality, and natural materials. Construction, agriculture, and food and beverages are the three largest sectors most dependent on nature. In recent years, biodiversity loss has been consistently identified by business leaders as one of the top risks to global business.

**All people depend on a healthy planet.** Nature plays a critical role in providing food, medicines and a variety of materials fundamental to the physical and mental well-being as well as livelihoods of all people. For example, an estimated 4 billion people rely on natural medicines for their health and some 70 per cent of drugs used for cancer are natural or synthetic products inspired by nature. Nature also contributes to non-material aspects of quality of life, including inspiration and learning, cultural expression and physical, psychological and spiritual development. Degradation of ecosystems, including from deforestation, competing use of land, uncontrolled expansion of agriculture particularly for intensive farming, and infrastructure development, as well as the unsustainable exploitation of wild species have created a 'perfect storm' for the spillover of diseases from wildlife to people. Investments in biodiversity including through jobs,

incentive reform, and policies that boost conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of biodiversity, and through an inclusive “One Health<sup>3</sup>” approach are essential elements of reducing the risk of future zoonotic outbreaks, and ensure a sustainable, equitable and green recovery of economies.

**Sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity is key to ensure that no one is left behind.** Every person, in every community, depends on biodiversity, but poorer and marginalized groups are those most directly vulnerable to biodiversity loss. Around one third of jobs in developing countries are directly dependent on biodiversity and ecosystem services, and rural and indigenous communities are particularly dependent on nature for their livelihoods and culture. More than a quarter of the global land area is traditionally owned, managed, used or occupied by indigenous peoples, covering one third of all remaining land wilderness areas. Indigenous peoples and local communities therefore have a particularly important role as custodians of nature. Empowerment of women, currently with limited or no access to resources and opportunities to contribute, is also critical as key actors and agents of change in biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, for example through significant and often overlooked roles in fisheries, seed conservation, and harvesting of wild resources, among many other areas.

**Restoration of biodiversity and implementation of nature-based solutions will be essential to meet the SDGs.** Ecosystem degradation is reducing the capacity of biodiversity to address climate change and compromising progress to achieve the SDGs, underlining the urgency of action on biodiversity for sustainable development. At least two billion hectares of currently degraded land require restoration to enhance biodiversity, ecosystem services and agricultural productivity. In addition, more than three billion people depend on marine and coastal biodiversity for their livelihoods and more than one-third of fish stocks are in urgent need of recovery. Nature-based solutions can contribute to climate mitigation and adaptation, food and water security and to protection from flooding and other extreme events, and they provide key opportunities for integrating biodiversity into actions to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs. For example, nature-based solutions can provide approximately one third of the solutions needed to achieve the climate mitigation targets of the Paris Agreement. Such solutions also provide co-benefits and promote synergies with other areas of global concern, such as desertification, land degradation and drought, ocean acidification, and biodiversity loss, while also creating local employment/ contributing to local livelihoods.

**The Decade of Action and Delivery for Sustainable Development provides a critical opportunity to halt biodiversity loss and encourage its sustainable use.** Many commitments have already been made for action on biodiversity at all scales. A strong focus on accelerating and scaling-up implementation is required to deliver on such commitments. In 2010, Parties to the CBD committed to “take effective and urgent action to halt the loss of biodiversity” through the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its Aichi targets. Many elements of these targets were subsequently embedded into the SDGs. Many other commitments have been made at national level, and through other multilateral environmental agreements, including those relating to wetlands, desertification, migratory species, species in international trade, plant genetic resources

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<sup>3</sup> “One Health” approaches consider the interdependent relationships between human, agricultural and environmental health.

and plant health, the ocean and fisheries, chemical management and climate change. Renewed and ambitious leadership is now required in the context of the Decade of Action to accelerate implementation of these and future commitments including those from the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and those for marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction.

**Urgent action on biodiversity is needed across all sectors and from all actors.** Action on biodiversity for sustainable development is needed by public and private sectors, including from national and sub-national governments, cities, the business and finance world, and civil society. The right conditions for action and innovation at scale, the removal of barriers to change, and deep-rooted shifts in both consumer culture and world views are all elements of the transformations required to secure a sustainable future for people, planet and prosperity.

#### ***Guiding questions<sup>4</sup>***

- *What is your vision of sustainable development that is positive for both people and nature?*
- *What are your plans to integrate ambitious and accelerated action for biodiversity into your country's sustainable development efforts?*
- *What actions are you taking on biodiversity that can accelerate progress to combat climate change and meet the SDGs?*
- *What measures are you taking to ensure a "One Health" approach (linking the health of people, livestock, and nature) to reduce the risk of future zoonotic pandemics?*

## **Leaders' Dialogue 1: Addressing biodiversity loss and mainstreaming biodiversity for sustainable development**

### ***Objective***

This session will highlight the opportunities and priorities for action to tackle the causes of biodiversity loss and for integrating action on biodiversity for sustainable development into key sectors. It is anticipated that Heads of State and Government and other leaders will demonstrate ambitious actions to address the causes of biodiversity loss and mainstream biodiversity action across all sectors of government, society and the economy.

### ***Key Issues***

**The main direct causes and impacts of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation are well known.** The direct causes of biodiversity loss have either grown steadily or accelerated in recent decades: changes in the use of land, wetland and marine areas that lead to habitat loss; overexploitation of natural resources; climate change; pollution; and invasive alien species. The underlying causes include consumption and production patterns, human population dynamics, trade, and the use of technology, which are all

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<sup>4</sup> One or more of these questions might be considered by Heads of State and Government and other leaders for interventions during the session.

affected by societal values, inequality, and behaviors. Although sustainable production practices exist, our food systems are currently the single biggest underlying source of decline in nature, responsible for three-quarters of deforestation, and for the most important pressures on marine fish stocks. Other sectors, such as the extractive industries, also have significant impacts on biodiversity. At the same time, food systems themselves are dependent on biodiversity and are therefore undermined by its loss. More than 75% of important global food crops depend at least in part on animal pollinators, whose declines around the world threaten food security. The impacts of climate change on biodiversity are already evident and will become more pronounced in the coming decades. Even for global warming of 1.5°C to 2°C, coastal and marine ecosystems will be significantly impacted, and the distribution of most species on land and in the ocean is projected to shrink or otherwise change dramatically, with significant repercussions for food security and other ecosystem services.

**There is widespread agreement on the actions urgently required to address biodiversity loss, and the need to embed these in all sectors of sustainable development.** Solutions to the loss of biodiversity can be found across sectors, including in: changes to food and agriculture systems (fisheries, forestry and agriculture, including for the production of food, fodder and fibres); financial and accounting systems; patterns of consumption and production; greening of supply chains; equitable governance; measures to ensure more integrated planning and decision making across sectors and territories; and incentives for biodiversity-positive outcomes. Currently, economic incentives generally favour activities that cause the loss of biodiversity. However, incorporating the multiple values of biodiversity into economic systems such as through incentives and pricing has proven to deliver more positive ecological, economic and social outcomes. Key to implementing such changes is delivering a whole-of-government approach to planning and action. Whilst innovation is important in addressing biodiversity loss and fostering its sustainable use, there are also many opportunities to build on existing mechanisms and institutions to efficiently achieve positive biodiversity outcomes, including through the strengthened and coherent implementation of multilateral environmental agreements and through better integrating biodiversity action into all productive sectors for sustainable development. Many solutions are context specific, providing opportunities for local adaptation and empowerment.

**Sustainable consumption and production will require decoupling the concept of a good life from perpetual economic growth.** Changes towards sustainable consumption and production, raising living standards of the poor and moderating consumption among wealthy populations, a circular economy and sustainable public procurement are central to addressing biodiversity loss, reducing inequalities, and achieving sustainable development. Such changes should be further supported by new metrics to measure wealth and wellbeing and to understand and track progress towards sustainable development.

**Positive incentives to ensure co-benefits for biodiversity, societies and economies.** The sustainable use of biodiversity, including through the legal trade in biodiversity-based products and services, can create positive economic incentives for the sustainable use of biodiversity; mobilize resources from the trade and finance communities; and promote sustainable consumption and production patterns. Such trade provides livelihood

opportunities for communities that rely on natural resources and can be strengthened with additional commitments to sustainable public and private sector procurement.

**Successful on-the-ground actions can be further scaled-up to help address biodiversity loss.** For example, species sustainable use and conservation efforts have reduced extinction trends for some animals. There have also been regional increases in areas under protection, improved sustainability in fisheries, increases in the restoration of forest and other ecosystems, and growth in the uptake of sustainable management practices recognized for example through various voluntary sustainability certification schemes.

**Whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity need to be strengthened.** Such approaches need to effectively engage indigenous peoples and local communities, women and girls, youth, the private sector, academia, local governments and other actors to deliver solutions that are replicable or scalable to the national level. Working across sectors to address biodiversity loss and foster its sustainable use will maximize synergies and multiple benefits, for example for climate change and land degradation, jobs and livelihoods, and food security. Education and learning systems and public awareness campaigns should be strengthened to better understand and communicate the values of biodiversity, to build public knowledge on the role of biodiversity and ecosystems for societies, and to deliver solutions to address the drivers of biodiversity loss. The co-benefits of action on biodiversity, ecosystems and climate change can trigger deeper and much needed transformation in lifestyles and consumption patterns.

### ***Guiding questions***

- *What are your priority ambitions and actions to address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss?*
- *What are your priorities and intentions for integrating biodiversity across sectors and into economic, trade and finance policies, and which policy areas or sectors are you prioritizing for this?*
- *Which are the greatest risks from biodiversity loss for your country and what policies are you planning to implement to address these risks?*

## **Leaders' Dialogue 2: Harnessing science, technology and innovation, capacity-building, access and benefit-sharing, financing and partnerships for biodiversity**

### ***Objective***

This session aims to highlight ways and means to support accelerated biodiversity action, including through harnessing science, technology and innovation, strengthening capacity-building, and enhancing access and benefit-sharing, financing and partnerships for biodiversity. It is anticipated that the session will provide an opportunity for Heads of State and Government and other leaders to identify implementation priorities and showcase initiatives and commitments to ensure the availability of sufficient resources

to deliver the post-2020 global biodiversity framework as a contribution to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

### ***Key Issues***

**Increased ambition and commitment are needed to repurpose existing resources and deliver new and additional resources and other means of implementation.** Such means of implementation include domestic and international resources, collaboration, partnerships and investments to achieve goals and targets for halting biodiversity loss, fostering its sustainable use and promoting ecosystem restoration for sustainable development.

**Transformation is needed to ensure financial and economic systems become positive for nature while ensuring well being of people.** Priorities to advance action for biodiversity include repurposing and aligning public and private financial flows with the pathway towards a nature-positive, carbon-neutral and equitable society; increased investments in biodiversity including for its conservation, sustainable use and ecosystem restoration; transparency about impacts on biodiversity and associated risks from other investments; alignment of COVID-19 economic recovery and stimulus packages with goals for biodiversity and sustainable development; supporting and investing in rural people and communities to empower them as critical agents of change; shifts towards sustainable and inclusive supply chains; and a focus on more transformational shifts that would allow for nature-positive economic models and alternative macro-economic indicators of sustainability to become a new normal.

**Both new finance and major repurposing of existing public and private finance are required.** The implementation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and the SDGs will require new and additional financing from both domestic and international public and private sources, including to meet internationally agreed finance targets. There are considerable opportunities to repurpose public finance and to realign incentives to support the conservation, sustainable use and restoration of biodiversity. Government spending that is harmful to biodiversity is conservatively estimated to be about US\$ 500 billion per year globally, primarily in support to fossil fuels, agriculture and fisheries. The total volume of finance flows that are harmful to biodiversity, encompassing all public and private expenditures, is likely to be many times larger. In comparison, the financial flows directed towards conservation and restoration of biodiversity total around US\$80 billion globally per year, while the costs of inaction to address biodiversity loss continue to grow.

**Capacity and readiness to access available finance are critical for the effective use of resources.** Additional efforts are required to support countries and communities to access funds from national, bilateral and multilateral financing mechanisms. Governments and financial regulatory authorities will also need to create and strengthen financial mechanisms and regulatory frameworks (such as nature bonds, and reporting and disclosure mechanisms) to support the wider uptake and scaling of efforts by individual communities, investors and private sector actors to benefit biodiversity. Nature-based solutions provide a proven vehicle for harnessing financial support for biodiversity.

**Science and technology, along with indigenous and local knowledge, can support transformations to sustainability.** Whilst there remain gaps in knowledge and capacity to address biodiversity loss, the evidence base for urgent action is robust. However, considerable opportunities remain for capacity building and technology transfer, for integrating indigenous and local knowledge systems into the evidence base for action, and for multidisciplinary research and education to foster sustainable consumption and production and address the causes of biodiversity loss. Mobilizing available knowledge, know-how and expertise is also critical to ensure effective action on biodiversity. Many technologies and innovations are already available to better monitor, use, conserve and restore biodiversity, for example through deployment of remote sensing tools, fishery vessel tracking, gene sequencing and bioinformatics for targeted conservation. However, the process and costs of critical biodiversity data collection, management and open access still need to be addressed.

**Access and benefit-sharing instruments have the potential to generate benefits for society and biodiversity.** Implementing such instruments would add value to existing resources and create incentives for strengthening sustainable use, conservation and ecosystem restoration practices as well as help to promote scientific research and technology transfer. However, progress towards the fair and equitable sharing of benefits resulting from access to genetic resources has been limited, and ongoing advances in biotechnology and synthetic biology alongside the increased use of genetic sequence data currently pose challenges for benefit sharing. A multilaterally agreed solution to this challenge that ensures the fair and equitable sharing of benefits while facilitating access to genetic resources has the potential to unleash substantial benefits across many sectors, including health.

**Multi-stakeholder partnerships and action across sectors are essential for positive biodiversity outcomes.** Strengthening partnerships across public and private sectors, including civil society, indigenous peoples, producers organizations, and local communities, women, youth, academia and other actors remains a priority to enable better outcomes for biodiversity and to deliver on the 2030 sustainable development agenda ensuring that no-one is left behind.

### ***Guiding questions***

- *What are your priorities and commitments to alter financial incentives, develop new financing instruments and/or change global financial and trade flows to ensure they are positive for nature?*
- *What are your priorities and commitments to ensure equitable access to capacity development, benefit-sharing from the use of biodiversity, technology and innovation including for women, for indigenous peoples and local communities, and for other vulnerable groups?*
- *What are your priorities and commitments to strengthen partnerships across public and private sectors and with civil society to address biodiversity loss and promote nature-based solutions for sustainable development?*
- *How is your government ensuring nature-positive economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic?*