

Remarks by Ambassador Guillermo Rishchynski, Canada Permanent Representative to the United Nations, for the US/Canada/Israel Team, 8th Session of the SDG Open Working Group, on Oceans and Seas, Forests, and Biodiversity

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I am pleased to be delivering this statement on behalf of our team—Canada, Israel and the United States.

Throughout this process, we have all acknowledged the need for a goal framework that takes seriously the need to integrate social, economic, and environmental issues and that responds to the very real ways that these issues are integrated in people's lives and communities. All of us depend on healthy ecosystems and on a vibrant natural resource base, and the topics we are addressing today – biodiversity, forests, and oceans – each reinforce the universality of this imperative. That we are in the midst of the sixth mass extinction of plants and animals – the worst extinction event in 65 million years; that we lose upward of 5 million hectares of forests a year – the forests on which a healthy climate depends; that oceans and seas are under dramatically accelerating pressures such as acidification, pollution, and overfishing – should be a wake-up call to us all.

Healthy ecosystems – including some we discussed earlier in our stocktaking – are especially crucial for poverty eradication. The rural poor, in particular, depend on a healthy natural resource base and are extremely vulnerable to environmental degradation. We therefore see considerable scope to integrate these and related issues into our eventual framework of goals and targets.

Let me start with biodiversity – biodiversity is essential for functioning ecosystems and ecosystem services. Biodiversity has both intrinsic value as the repository of life, and economic and social value – through pest management, pollination, water purification, soil health, air quality control, and myriad other functions that impact our food and health.

We have also heard the warnings from the scientific community. Compared to a “background” extinction rate of 1 to 5 species a year, we are currently losing species at

thousands of times that rate, with dozens of species going extinct every day. The post-2015 development agenda is only one place for addressing biodiversity issues, but however we address them, it is clear we need to do so with urgency. We note that there are agreements including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the associated Aichi targets that already reflect general agreement about the importance of biodiversity and ecosystem services, and we urge that any discussion we have here reinforce existing efforts like the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, as these are considered to be part of the overarching framework on biodiversity.

Forests, in turn, play an absolutely vital role in moderating the climate, maintaining water quantity and quality, conserving biodiversity, and providing other environmental goods and services that are critical for life, sustainable economic growth, and poverty alleviation.

Forests are home to more than 300 million indigenous and other forest-dependent people around the world. They contribute to the development and livelihoods of more than 1.6 billion people. Forty-six percent of the world's terrestrial carbon is also held in forests, and including deforestation or replenishment of forest stocks could be one clear means of integrating climate change into the post-2015 framework, as we highlighted in the January session.

As we heard yesterday, 80 percent of global deforestation – the 5.2 million hectares lost a year – is also driven by the expansion of agricultural land which reinforces the need to integrate goals and targets – like food security or the need to manage natural resource assets sustainably – in a mutually reinforcing way.

Turning to oceans, the health of our oceans and seas clearly affect us all – our food security, our economies, our climate. Oceans are an essential source of livelihood for the more than 50 million people who are directly – and 300–500 million indirectly – employed in fishing or aquaculture, many of whom work in small-scale fisheries that are economically critical to their communities. Marine fisheries contribute over \$250 billion to the global economy, and more than one billion people – mainly in developing countries – rely on seafood as their primary source of protein and nutrients.

Yet despite their importance to livelihoods and well-being, our oceans face many challenges which we feel a post-2015 framework could address. To name a few:

Pollution and runoff: An estimated 80 percent of marine pollution originates on land through agricultural runoff, sewage, and wastewater discharges, which have already resulted in 600 “dead zones” where fish and marine life cannot thrive.

Debris: Debris of various kinds – 60 to 80 percent plastics – have concentrated in massive “garbage patches” while illegal discharge of oil at sea presents a serious ongoing problem.

Overfishing and other unsustainable fishing practices: Of the world’s marine fisheries, for which reasonable data exists, 57 percent cannot support expanded harvest and 30 percent are already overexploited.

Ocean acidification: The upper oceans have warmed in the past 40 years and oceans absorb up to 90 percent of the excess heat. This has caused increased acidification and threatens food chains connected to oceans. As a result, ocean acidity has increased by 30 percent since the Industrial Revolution.

Protection: Only an estimated 1–3 percent of the world’s oceans are protected, compared to 12 percent of land. Yet conservation of coastal and marine areas would provide multiple benefits as these ecosystems provide key services such as breeding grounds for marine species, carbon “sinks,” and natural resilience against storms and other disasters.

The recommendations the OWG eventually makes will clearly need to give specific attention to the conservation and sustainable use of both terrestrial and marine natural ecosystems and biodiversity, although we are flexible on the specific architecture by which this key set of issues might be highlighted.

We have taken note of the proposals in many statements which call for an oceans goal. Based on the science we have heard over these two days and the potential for impact, we believe that this warrants serious consideration and should be balanced by our desire to have a limited number of goals.

Oceans and seas, forests and biodiversity will also need to be taken into account in considering other potential goals, including those related to food security.

We look forward to continuing our discussions on this important issue in the context of the next phase of the OWG deliberations.

Thank you.

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