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Setting the Content for 2nd Day of the Expert Group Meeting on SDG 15
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Good morning colleagues and friends,

Thank you, Shantanu, for the introduction. I am delighted to join you to provide my reflections on how Goal 15 can advance sustainable development solutions. I wish to thank the Division for Sustainable Development Goals, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, together with partners, for convening this meeting. The suite of expertise, knowledge and vision in this room is unparalleled. It represents the diversity of SDG15 - one which we must harness.

[1. Opportunity]

While ambitious and wide-ranging, SDG15 presents an opportunity. The substantive issues under this Goal contribute towards national sustainability pathways in different ways. For example, collaboration between the conservation and financial communities has been critical in the development of innovative solutions to protect biodiversity and natural resources. These connections can outline a pathway for building a new asset class around conservation benefits. Moreover, as we have heard yesterday, Goal 15 and many of its targets serve as key accelerators for achieving other SDGs.

[2. Sustainability Transitions]

Colleagues and Friends,

As with every opportunity, we need data and science to back our case, to assess the implications of various policy options and to inform future work. For the Convention on Biological Diversity, this work is important as we consider a post-2020 global biodiversity framework. Moreover, in the context of the Convention, transitions research perspectives have been applied to explore strategies to help accelerate and guide the mainstreaming of biodiversity into economic sectors.

The science is clear. Systemic changes are necessary. Policy ambitions agreed upon so far, let alone concrete commitments and actions, while important, are not enough. Ecological and resilience research demonstrates that there is a risk of ecological boundaries being crossed, and potentially resulting in tipping points in climate and ecosystems that might lead to an acceleration of environmental disruption. The **2018 Global Risk Report** prepared by the World Economic Forum, for example, lists ecological collapse and biodiversity loss among the top 10 risks in terms of impact.

The background documents for this meeting also depict this stark reality. Ecosystems continue to decline, and biodiversity continues to be lost at unprecedented levels. Response indicators for SDG15 show that commitments towards implementation are increasing. While this is good news, on the other hand, the indicators available on the state of Life on Land, show decline. This is also consistent with the recent regional assessment reports by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, which found that biodiversity is in decline in all regions of the world. Solving this dichotomy between commitments and outcome is imperative.

Research from CI about to be published: 38% indicate targets benefit nature, but 66% indicate typical actions harm nature and biodiversity. More research needs to be done.

This concern has also been expressed in a series of Sustainable Development Forums which the UN Regional Economic Commissions have been organizing. Given our interconnected system, what should also concern us, is the broader implications of SDG15 to our wellbeing. For example, losing our native pollinators can gravely impact to our food production systems (SDG2); in turn affecting our economies, as well as people's livelihoods, health and wellbeing.

Unmitigated pressures on our ecosystems make such tipping points more likely to occur. Such pressures are embedded in societal structures, mostly in consumption and production patterns in developed societies as well as socio-economic and cultural dynamics in developing countries. The interlinkages and interdependencies that are inter-woven with economic and governance complexities, make achieving SDG15 a complex global challenge.

Our efforts, therefore, cannot merely seek to remediate and soften the negative impacts of unsustainability; on the contrary we need to address the root causes that have led to the 'symptoms of unsustainability'. This means shifting to new ways of production and consumption and reorienting economic development pathways towards an "economy within ecological boundaries", while still improving the state of the environment and creating opportunities for societal well-being in the long-term.

This is not new thinking, but it needs to be continually highlighted.

In this context, it is also important for interventions to focus on sustainability transitions in relevant economic sectors, and societal systems, that determine how natural resources are used and how that use impacts our ecosystems. This requires us to show the interrelationship of SDG15 to other SDGs, and to identify actions that can fit together to create the overall systems change required to meet our present day challenges and equip us to manage future ones.

[3. Beyond 2020- technologies]

Colleagues, this is important given the times we are in. We live in a technological era evolving at incredible speed and scale, with a range of associated opportunities and risks. Our history has led us into the Fourth Industrial Revolution. From the perspective of SDG 15, we need to ask ourselves, how we can harness it for the world.

Technologies driving the Fourth Industrial Revolution, include tools such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, advancements in quantum computing, encoding data into DNA, virtual/artificial reality, biotechnology and new materials, that can prove to be used for good or for worse. Our challenge is to increase the likelihood that they are used for good and to ensure that their benefits are distributed fairly. By beginning to anticipate the future effects of these new technologies, we can work to ensure that the Fourth Industrial Revolution is human-led and earth-centered. In terms of SDG15 and the biodiversity community there are areas, such as agriculture, restoration, and communications, that could capitalize on these new technologies to

ensure the conservation and sustainable use of nature. There is also traditional knowledge and natural solutions that need to be considered in the mix.

In urban areas, vertical gardening, for example, has provided a shift in production and sourcing methods. In the future, for example, AeroFarms – which germinates seeds in the air with a mist of nutrients – has the potential to further transform the ways cities eat. When we look at innovations that could affect the supply chain, block chain emerges as a promising method to trace the entire sourcing and supply chain.

Technologies also have the potential to transform the way we approach ecosystem restoration. For example, there are companies that utilize drones to determine what species are needed and where, in order to reforest, replant, and restore ecosystems. Emerging technologies can also assist with ocean ecosystem restoration.

Natural technologies are also readily available, for example, where countries are harnessing the opportunities to fuse natural infrastructure with technology and built infrastructure to enhance resilience to climate change. In China, for example, cities are being built as ‘sponges’, with two cities in particular investing over a billion dollars in natural infrastructure for flood control, water conservation and quality, and natural ecosystem protection. These cities have already proven more resilient to typhoons and heavy storms.

The links to climate actions are also important. Nature-based solutions include: halting or substantially reducing deforestation and other forms of habitat loss and destruction; restoring and rehabilitating degraded habitats, without compromising other ecosystems; and sustainably managing croplands, pastures and coastal ecosystems. These solutions could provide up to half of the cost-effective CO₂ mitigation required by 2030, with ecosystem restoration as a major part. Done right, this could also improve resilience measures to climate change, helping communities adapt to its unavoidable effects.

Tools for communications are also evolving. Satellite and geo-tagged data can provide a critical mechanism to provide a more holistic picture of nature, its pressures and trends. Using global layers such as the Global Forest Watch data on deforestation over time, with additional datasets such as infrastructure development over time, and trade in commodities over time, can tell a compelling story to the general public and to decision makers about our impact on natural ecosystems. Geospatial data from other sources can also be integrated into such tools. As a result, through technology we can produce maps that serve a powerful role by presenting peer-reviewed science, in a visual way, enabling people to connect to nature and to lifestyle choices.

[4. Concluding Remarks]

As we take stock of where we are in terms of progress towards SDG15 and suggest ways forward, let me focus on two final points:

First, where are we with respect to the global coverage of terrestrial protected areas and where we will likely be in 2020.

Among the 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets, there has been considerable progress on in-situ conservation. Global coverage of terrestrial protected areas reached 15% by the end of 2017, approaching the 17 % minimum called for. This is relevant to Target 15.1 of SDG15.

If the commitments communicated by Parties to the Convention are implemented, they will add more than enough area to reach the minimum coverage targets for both terrestrial and marine realms, by 2020. Beyond these national commitments, additional opportunities for progress exist through the recognition and reporting of territories and areas conserved by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (ICCA), subject to their free, prior and informed consent.

While progress has been made, there is still much work to be done. Progress is not sufficient for many of the qualifying elements of Target 11, including connectivity, effective and equitable management, among others. However, as spatial data for proposed and newly established protected areas becomes available, and as Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, other effective area-based conservation measures are added, it is likely that the status of these elements will improve too.

However, expansion of the global protected area estate, will not be sufficient to halt global biodiversity losses if it is not managed effectively, and does not have appropriate governance and equity measures in place. Currently, the global protected area system is dominated by state-managed protected areas. In past, the Convention's decisions have invited Parties to diversify and strengthen protected area governance types and to recognize the contribution of co-managed protected areas, privately protected areas and territories and areas conserved by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities.

Areas conserved for cultural and spiritual values, with governance and management that respect and are informed by those values, often result in positive biodiversity outcomes. The linkages between biological and cultural diversity need to be considered if we are to achieve coherence and success in the coming decades. Other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) offer an important tool to do this, providing opportunities to expand the range of stakeholders and sectors engaged in conservation. As we address 'custodians of terrestrial ecosystems' in the program, I invite speakers to further discuss the opportunities and challenges of OECMs, and their role in advancing SDG15.

My second and final point focuses on how to make SDG15 part of a larger transformational shift in how we address conservation and sustainable use.

Achieving the elements of SDG15, clearly require more sustainable societies. As acknowledged by the Convention and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, this requires transformational change. Change in the way governments work. Change in the way the private sector operates. And, above all, change in own behaviour -- as consumers and as citizens. Among other things, we will need to shift to less meat-intensive diets, waste far less food, and dramatically reduce our consumption of non-renewable resources.

Further efforts will be needed to understand human, group and corporate behaviour and to design decision-making processes to address the underlying drivers of loss, and the institutional transformation required to facilitate implementation of decisions for halting this loss.

I believe that if we raise our collective efforts in the next few years, if the means to address lagging aspects of SDG15 are further developed, and if all stakeholders, State and non-State, strive for enhanced and targeted implementation of national commitments in a coherent manner, the achievement of many of the targets under SDG15, will be possible.

Thank you for your attention.

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