

Statement by Ambassador Durga P. Bhattarai, Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations, at the Eighth Session of the UNGA's Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals under the theme "Oceans and seas, forests, biodiversity"

04 February 2014, New York

(as delivered)

Distinguished Co-chairs,

I align my statement with the statements made by Bolivia and Benin on behalf of the G77 and China, and the LDCs, respectively.

First of all, I wish to put on record our admiration for your very professional and well-balanced facilitating role as Co-chairs during the previous seven sessions of this Working Group, and to express my delegation's support to your sailing the Group through this eighth session in a like manner. We appreciate the Technical Support Teams for their excellent issue briefs and also thank the distinguished speakers and panelists who shared with us their knowledge, experience and insights today and yesterday.

Co-Chairs,

The oceans, seas, forests and biodiversity- all cross-cutting in nature- are linked to the vital aspects of human survival: food and fuels, lives and livelihoods, and refuge and resilience. These are also the sources of wider human wellbeing on account of their providing nutrition, medicines, energy, timber, paper, and clean air and water, to name a few. These have been part and partial of human culture and civilizations through ages, and have always been the preferred destination for recreation, tourism, exploration and spiritual advancement. Oceans and seas have always facilitated trade and transport.

The oceans, seas, forests and biodiversity also present a great part of solution to the challenges of our time concerning eradicating poverty and hunger; reducing disaster risks; raising agricultural productivity and food security; cleaning, protecting and sustaining environment and ecosystems; pursuing blue and green economy; and enriching wider social, economic and spiritual aspects of human development. These are doubtlessly very fundamental to ensuring sustainable development.

Nonetheless, these have been brutally assaulted time and again for a variety of reasons, ranging from irresponsible race to amass resources to the lack of knowledge and awareness, and from inadequate corrective measures to the sheer need of survival of human lives.

The critical importance of oceans, seas, forests and biodiversity in sustainable development has consistently been recognized by all related UN conventions and other international instruments including the Rio+20 outcome document. The MDGs process had also recognized their importance and attempted to integrate them to some extent, but the related goal remains one of the least

achieved. Moreover, the organic linkage between oceans and the vast columns of water and ecology in the Himalayas and mountains is often forgotten, or mentioned only casually, and, thus, undermined to the detriment of lives and livelihoods of the common people and centuries-old civilizational heritages.

Nepal does not subscribe to the view that landlocked developing countries may not be interested in oceans and seas. The Government of Nepal recognized early on the importance of oceans as the global common, and actively contributed to the process of United Nations Convention on Law of Ocean and Seas (UNCLOS). Over time, however, we see that the high seas have virtually shrunk not only for the landlocked developing countries but for all less capable countries, including the SIDS. It is painful to see the level of seas rise together with the receding snowlines up in the Himalayas, with destructive results at both ends. Bursting of glacial lakes, flash floods, landslides, deforestation, and land degradation regularly deplete biodiversity. The resulting displacement of people has human and economic costs that can hardly be recovered. All this needs to change.

As a direct witness and victim of the process, Nepal has recognized the critical role of forests and biodiversity in addressing various human needs and challenges, especially in relation to environmental aspect of development, which is crucial in the uniquely contradicting terrains of the country. Various policies, programs, and strategies cut across issues related to forests and biodiversity and together they have been integrated into the national development plan.

Rich in biodiversity and home to several rare species of flora and fauna, Nepal understood the value of protected areas and has designated nearly a quarter (23.23%) of its geographical area as wildlife parks and preserved areas in order to protect the invaluable bio-diversity and ecosystems across the country. Some of such areas are recognized as the World natural heritage sites by UNESCO. We believe Nepal's community forestry programme, long cherished as a successful model, is worth replicating elsewhere as an example of best practices. The concept of 'green development' has been progressively adopted to make human activities and development process environment friendly.

Much more needs to be done though. We need to manage and utilize these diverse biological resources with a greater efficiency and effectiveness for the benefit of the people towards achieving our overarching goal of poverty eradication while also seeking to ensure environmental sustainability. For this, we need even more enhanced technical and financial support from the international community.

Co-Chairs,

Against this background, Nepal wishes to make some specific recommendations regarding the inclusion of oceans, seas, forests and bio-diversity into SDGs:

- Oceans, seas, forest and biodiversity issues should be dealt with in an integrated and holistic manner, with full recognition of their organic interconnectedness.

- These should be integrated into overarching goals related to poverty eradication, inclusive green economy, overall human well-being and sustainable development, linking them to food security, recreation, nutrition and human health, and also their own health.
- The commitments made in Istanbul Programme of Action (IPOA) for the LDCs in relation to these issues should be fully integrated.
- The rights of LLDCs must be fully recognized and given due priority. We urge all parties to the UNCLOS to fully and sincerely implement their obligations under the Convention.
- The importance of conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction must be recognized for the common benefits of humankind, and reflected accordingly.
- Enhanced human, technical and financial resources need to be provided to the developing countries to benefit from the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). In this connection, we call upon all parties of the CBD to effectively implement Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and meet Aichi biodiversity targets.
- Adoption and full implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) should be in order.
- ‘Sustainable Mountain Development’ must be an inseparable part of sustainable development goals in view of the marginalization of the mountain communities and the need to maintain ecosystem while pursuing socio-economic development.
- Protection of ecosystems involving land, forests and ocean and the natural resources inherent in them, their conservation and sustainable use should be put in priority. Designation of more conservation and protected areas should be encouraged and supported as a campaign. Also, sharing and replication of best practices should be encouraged and supported.
- Effective implementation of the CBD and UNFCCC should be undertaken.
- More research and development and adoption of science, technology and innovation are necessary to confront the additional challenges brought by climate change. The developing countries, especially the LDCs are strongly in need of wider dissemination of relevant knowledge and, transfer of technology in this respect.

Co-Chairs,

In conclusion, we would like to see all these concerns integrated into SDGs either as stand-alone goal with various targets and indicators under it or specific targets and indicators embedded with other goals on these issues. More importantly, while dealing with these issues in post-2015 development agenda and SDGs, the vulnerability, special situation, and special needs of LDCs, LLDCs, SIDS and mountain developing countries should be taken into due consideration.

I thank you, Co-Chairs, for your attention.