EIGHTH SESSION OF THE OPEN WORKING GROUP OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

New York, 3 – 7 February 2014

Statement of H.E. Mr. Andrea Orlando
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Interactive exchange of views on
"*Oceans and Seas, Forests, Biodiversity*"

We have the honor to make this intervention also on behalf of Turkey and Spain, with whom we are pleased to share the membership in this Open Working Group.

(Oceans and Seas)

Distinguished co-Chairs, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Although we continue to call our planet "The Earth", over 70% of its surface is covered by water – the oceans and seas – that gives it the beautiful and unique blue hue that we admire in the images taken from space. When compared to land, the oceans are seemingly an immense resource still to be harnessed in full. In spite of the fact that the human body is more than 70% water, humans are land creatures and on the land they have established the social, environmental and economic architecture for their wellbeing. The exploitation, sustainable or otherwise, of the natural land resources is incomparably easier than the utilization of the oceans': the land can be mined, plowed and travelled almost effortlessly when compared to what it would take to do the same in the seas and oceans. Over the millennia, humans have nevertheless learned to live on shores and islands, and to utilize the oceans' resources for food and transportation-communications.

2. Only recently, however, we have begun to understand the full extent of the role that oceans have on the quality and survival of life on the land, much beyond providing food or means of communications. The global alarm on CO2 emissions has prompted a healthy abundance of studies aimed at understanding how the oceans can help the planet stay healthy in spite of the massive chemical and physical changes produced by GHG emissions in the atmosphere. Although it has been confirmed that the oceans do absorb CO2 at a high rate, that the temperature variations inside the oceans are smaller than those outside them, and that the global oceanic conveyor belt current – the Earth thermostat – is presently functioning well, it has also been learned that the climate stabilizing role of the oceans can drastically change on short timescales. For instance, the increased in precipitations in the northern hemisphere lower the salinity of the oceans thereby negatively affecting ocean currents such as the Gulf Stream; higher ocean temperatures weaken the oceans ability to absorb CO2 and harm the marine food chain.

3. While this climate threat to the entire planet goes on virtually unchecked, sea level – as confirmed by the latest IPCC report – is rising at an alarming rate due to the negative effects of increasing CO2 concentration in the atmosphere, thereby posing an immediate and real threat to the survival of those peoples and communities who live on very little land either by the sea or surrounded by immense ocean masses. The magnitude of the social and humanitarian threat posed by sea level rise far surpasses any economic consideration; loss of homeland and related identity, relocation, changes in ways of life are its real and potentially devastating consequences.
4.
5. The marine equivalent of land deforestation – ocean acidification that affects coral reefs and the production of plankton, thus the marine food chain – is also a devastating consequence of CO2 high concentrations in the atmosphere. But there is more. CO2 emissions are not the only anthropogenic activity creating havoc in the oceans and incapacitating their role as guardians of the climate and providers of food. Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing (UUI) and a non sustainable use of living marine resources are not only threatening food security for over half a billion people living on less than 1 meter above sea level, but also the protein intake of billions of people who live on land. Pollution, 80% of which is generated by land-based activities, is literally

suffocating marine life, endangering marine species and exhausting the marine food chain. The destruction of valuable habitats and unique ecosystems is widely spread. Invasive species, transported were they do not occur naturally by human activity are disrupting the ecological architecture of marine environments, thus again the marine food chain.

Distinguished Participants,

6. The oceans are indeed a resource, that we may be poised to harness in full, especially now that the land based resources appear to be dangerously depleted in view of the increasing population pressures and persisting food insecurity and poverty. We have already begun the unsustainable utilization of the resource, generating damages that are probably permanent, yet adaptable to, provided that we plan to make sustainability the main objective of all future human activities. The oceans however are a unique and irreplaceable resource that we can harness only if we change the way we pursue a better quality of life on Earth. The oceans will continue to be the guardians of the Earth climate if human actions do not interfere with them.

7. Considering that all recent major outcomes of international discussions – the FWW and the MDGs special event outcome of September 2013, just to quote the most important – have called for a post-2015 development framework that be universal in nature and applicable to all countries, we believe that a global commitment to the preservation of the oceans as healthy guardians of the Earth climate, being equivalent to a commitment to reducing GHG emissions to levels that do not threaten the survival of life on the planet, is in order. The level is measurable, and the commitment is applicable and feasible in all national contexts.

(Forestry)

Distinguished Co-Chairs,

8. Forests are a very important part of the ecosystem and they have a central role in tackling most of the challenges we have been addressing in the Open Working Group. Poverty,

food security and agriculture, biodiversity, climate change, desertification and land degradation, energy, sustainable consumption and water management are some of the issues that are linked to forest and sustainable forest management.

9. Productive and socio-economic functions of forests should be utilized within the ecosystem integrity. However, while deforestation has shown a decreasing trend over years it is still alarming in many countries, Therefore there should also be a strong emphasis on elimination or mitigation of all threats on forests and deforestation.

10. Deforestation and forest degradation stems out various drivers such as conversion of forests to other land uses (agricultural crops, livestock, etc.), infrastructure development, population pressures, poverty. These drivers should be managed through cross-sectoral policies. Sustainable forest management (SFM) stands as a critical tool for conserving current forests, improving their state as well as implementing measures for degraded forest lands, through reforestation and afforestation. SFM supports resilience of forests to natural hazards and promotes an increase in health and vitality of forest ecosystem. SFM is consistent with the green economy approach that supports forest-dependent local communities with forest products and services thus encouraging green jobs in rural areas. In order to improve livelihoods of forest-related local population, it is necessary to ensure better employment conditions in formal agroforestry sector.

11. SFM, multi-functionality of forests and the role of forests addressing global challenges should have an important place in the post-2015 development agenda. Similarly, since forests contain 80% of the terrestrial biodiversity, this richness should be also protected and promoted.

12. The ecological value and other forest ecosystem services in general has still not been fully considered, although forest products and services contribute nearly 1 per cent to GDP. It is thus essential to recognize these services and assign them a monetary value as part of our common natural capital.

13. There are various ongoing international debates and agreements on forests which may result in regional approaches and perspectives to achieve global objectives on forests. In this context, it has to be mentioned, singularly, the on-going process of reviewing the International Arrangement on Forest (IAF), which is conducted within the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) and might deliver sound and timely outcomes by 2015, thus feeding the post-2015 UN sustainable development agenda. When considering goals and targets related to forests, we should take on board the current four global forest objectives, endorsed by the UNGA in 2008, and, as appropriate, other international goals affecting forests, such as CBD and UNCCD strategic plans, the Bonn Challenge, regional forest-related process, etc. In this sense, the current knowledge of criteria and indicators applying to forests should be used to assess the achievement of the former targets.

(Biodiversity)

Distinguished co-chairs,

14. Marine and terrestrial biodiversity are essential to human wellbeing and for the welfare of present and future generations. Sustainable development relies on biodiversity given its strong interdependence with the provision of basic goods and services, its influence on the resilience of ecological systems to global change and its deep cultural role.

15. The Earth's ecological functions, which provide what humans perceive as goods and services, depend on the variety and variability of genes, species, populations and ecosystems. As a result, the supply of basic necessities of life, such as food, shelter, freshwater and clean air are either directly or indirectly connected to biological diversity. The provision of food, fiber, medicines and fresh water, pollination of crops, filtration of pollutants, and protection from natural disasters are among those ecosystem services strongly linked to changes in biodiversity. Cultural services such as spiritual and religious values, opportunities for knowledge and education, as well as recreational and aesthetic values, are also connected to biodiversity change.

16. We are living today a dramatic biodiversity loss. This is connected with the depletion of a range of ecosystem services pushed beyond their resilience capacity. There are several human-driven processes which reduce or threaten biodiversity, like overexploitation of natural resources, pollution, land use and degradation, deforestation, climate change and ocean acidification, invasive alien species.

17. Ecosystem degradation and the consequent loss of ecosystem services is one of the main sources of disaster risk. Biodiversity conservation and ecological restoration can be seen as a cost-effective investment in risk-avoidance for the global community. The consequences of abrupt ecosystem changes on a large scale are so risky for human security that it should be rational to simply assume a conservative approach in biodiversity conservation.

18. In many countries, millions of people, often among the poorest, are completely or substantially dependent on harvested plants and animals for their livelihoods. Indigenous and local communities and their cultures often rely directly on the uses of biological diversity, even as health care or as bush meat for protein supply. UN CBD institutions have specifically deepened the interrelations between biodiversity and poverty, both from the point of view of dependency of the poor on biodiversity and the reduction of poverty by means of biodiversity conservation.

19. The majority of poor and disadvantaged people, particularly in rural areas, are highly dependent on biodiversity, having no alternatives for dealing with environmental, food security and health risks. Biodiversity provides them with a cost effective and readily accessible insurance. However, this “poverty trap”, caused by the disproportionate dependency on the lower values of goods and services supplied by biodiversity, has significant policy implications linked to the need of overcoming biodiversity dependency to improve poor livelihoods. Moreover, biodiversity loss is cause and effect of land degradation phenomena, which at their extreme rate bring to irreversible desertification. In the poorest areas of the world, land degradation and desertification negatively affect local agriculture, increasing poverty and forced environmental migration.

20. Several biodiversity conservation initiatives - community timber enterprises, payments for ecosystem services, nature-based tourism, fish spillover, mangrove restoration, special protected area employment, agroforestry, grasslands management, and agrobiodiversity conservation - have shown, to a certain extent, impacts on poverty reduction. For other ongoing biodiversity conservation mechanisms - bushmeat and medicinal plant marketing, woodcarving, and bio-prospecting - the evidence is still weak. These experiences have nonetheless emphasized the need to ensure that conservation initiatives do not limit the benefits to the households with higher assets and social capital, do not widen income disparities and do reduce discrimination against women.

21. A vital sub-set of biodiversity is agricultural biodiversity, also known as "agro-biodiversity", that includes the biological resources that are fundamental for food and agriculture, such as crop varieties, forestry, livestock, fisheries, pollinators. The conservation and sustainable use of the agro-biodiversity plays a critical role in the fight against hunger, by ensuring environmental sustainability while increasing food and agriculture production. Benefits of agrobiodiversity areas are not at all reflected by the market, and its conservation is often carried out by poor smallholder farmers, who maintain certain crop species/varieties at their own cost, with the aim to feed themselves and minimize risk, for instance in the event of harvest failure. A particular species/variety may also be socially and culturally valuable, used as part of a traditional cuisine or ceremony. Smallholder farmers are the guardian of biodiversity and produce benefits at the local, national or even global level. Their role must be recognized and valued.

22. The application of best practices in agriculture, starting from organic agriculture, sustainable forest management and sustainable fisheries should become standard practice, and approaches aimed at optimizing multiple ecosystem services instead of maximizing a single one should be promoted. In many cases, multiple drivers are combining to cause biodiversity loss and degradation of ecosystem.

23. The SDGs need to address the increasing impact of climate change on biodiversity and poverty. Some of climate change effects as rising temperatures, extreme weather

patterns, changes in rainfall, together with the prevalence of pests and diseases are threatening agricultural productivity and undermining global food security. This, coupled with the pressures of human population increase, will lead to an increase of extreme poverty and in the demand for food. Thus, efforts to reduce emissions and strategies to adapt agriculture and forestry to climate change are among the most urgent challenges of our time.

24. As already recognized in MDGs, an effective way to combat the social impacts of increased climate-related disasters and biodiversity loss is to promote gender equality and empowering women. The reason is linked to the climate-related impacts, like depletion of natural resources and decreased availability of potable water, which increases the workload of women, the burden on their health and limits their time to participate in decision-making and income-generating activities, thus reducing their livelihood assets.

In conclusion distinguished co-chairs,

25. Biodiversity contributes across the thematic areas of food and nutrition, health, environmental sustainability and water, resulting in direct benefits for combating food insecurity and malnutrition, developing efficient and sustainable production systems for agriculture and fisheries, increasing resilience of livelihoods against crises, improving rural economies, and helping to reduce impacts on land degradation, water cycles and genetic diversity.

26. The current decline in biodiversity is largely the result of human activities and represents a serious threat to poverty eradication and, more generally, human sustainable development. Even if the poor would face the earliest impacts of such changes, all societies and communities would be ultimately affected. If humanity is to have a future on this earth, biological diversity must be conserved so that these functions and services are maintained.

27. The transition from MDGs to SDGs requires an adequate recognition of the value of biodiversity and ecosystem services in all basic human needs. There is also a pressing

need to address the underlying drivers of biodiversity loss through a holistic and integrated approach. The process we are undergoing in defining the SDGs provides us with an incredible opportunity to do so at a global level by, on one side, addressing the issue of biodiversity conservation, while on the other, phasing out environmentally harmful human-driven processes and activities that undermine the functioning of the Earth's support system.

28. To facilitate the integration of biodiversity targets into the SDG framework it is necessary to identify suitable metrics, indicators and targets that link biodiversity to the various goals of the framework. In order to integrate biodiversity into overarching goals, addressing broad concepts such as poverty eradication, sustainable development, sustainable consumption and production and human well-being, there is an urgent need to develop and use comprehensive and integrated measures of sustainable well-being, as alternatives or additional to GDP.

Finally Distinguished Co-Chairs,

29. Considering the globally agreed CBD goals and targets and the state of the art for indicators in this area, we encourage all of us to insert among SDGs the most significant objectives and indicators defined in the UN-CBD framework, with an overarching aim to halt biodiversity loss by 2020 and thereby contributing to a sustaining healthy Planet. The goals might be as indicated in the CBD Strategic Goals. The consideration of existing goals and targets ensures policy coherence building on existing implementation processes.

Thank you.