

**Statement by
David Cooper
Acting Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity
CBD SBSTTA 26 Opening Remarks
13 May 2024**

Thank you very much Chair, dear Senka. Excellencies, distinguished delegates, observers, colleagues, let me join the Chair and the Executive Director in welcoming you to this 26th meeting of SBSTTA.

I'd like to begin by also expressing my solidarity with the victims of the recent floods here in Kenya, also in Brazil and in other parts of our planet, and also of other catastrophes caused by environmental issues. We are paying the price for inaction. More and more we are seeing people not only in coastal areas, in small islands, in rural areas, but also in urban areas, suffering and becoming the victims of frequent and severe environmental catastrophes.

These are a result of climate change, yes, but also of ecosystem degradation, of biodiversity loss. The sense of urgency to reverse the trends gives us more responsibility in working together, in supporting governments, supporting communities to act fast to achieve the global commitments that have been set. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, or The Biodiversity Plan, is an urgent plan to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity.

As we know, biodiversity and ecosystem services mitigate environmental catastrophes and also enhance the capability to recover from them. We cannot dissociate biodiversity loss from the other global issues including climate change, the water crisis, and the pollution crisis. The loss of ecosystem services, too much water or too little water, changes of the Earth's temperature, they are all related; they are all contributing to biodiversity loss and vice versa.

The Biodiversity Plan is part, an important part – an essential part – of the response to these challenges. Some question how realistic it is, given how ambitious the goals and targets are. But given the impacts that we have, that we see, we have to ask ourselves, is there any other path, any other realistic path other than taking the actions we need to implement The Biodiversity Plan to achieve these goals and targets? We're here this week at SBSTTA 26 to further strengthen our collective efforts with scientific and technical and technological advice, with inputs from the technical expert groups to support the implementation of The Biodiversity Plan.



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This meeting, of course, will be followed by the Fourth Meeting of The Subsidiary Body on Implementation next week, and both meetings will then contribute to COP 16 in Cali, Colombia later this year. We see greater and greater attention to these issues. We have here more than 1,400 delegates registered, including 600 representing Parties from more than a hundred and fifty countries.

We've been able to finance on request representatives from the eligible Parties, and I would like to recognize the 13 governments for their generous financial support that have helped make this possible: namely Austria, Belgium, Canada, Finland, Germany, Japan, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Thanks to their contributions we've funded 100 developing country Parties to participate in this meeting. But let me also take this opportunity to note that as we approach the upcoming meeting of the Working Group on Digital Sequence Information, the Fifth Meeting of SBI and COP 16 and the concurrent meetings of the protocols, we will need additional funding. We have issued a notification to this effect recently and I urge all those Parties, in a position to do so, to contribute, so that we can ensure full participation in the upcoming meetings.

I also would like to acknowledge the presence of representatives of indigenous peoples and of local communities in this meeting. We have over 80 representatives and we look forward to their active engagement in the meeting. Thanks to Australia, Canada, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK for helping to support the funding of some representatives from these indigenous peoples and from local communities.

Let me also thank our colleagues in Kenya as well as colleagues in the UN here for welcoming us despite the difficulties caused by the recent flooding. As the Executive Director mentioned already, a key part to assuring the implementation of The Biodiversity Plan is that we are able to monitor progress towards it. And that is why the first substantive agenda item that you have before you is so important.

The work on finalizing the monitoring framework including the list of indicators the Parties will use in reporting on progress. I would like to give my sincere appreciation to all of those that have been working through the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on monitoring over the past year and a half for putting together such a comprehensive and complete set of proposals to this Body. The AHTEG has drawn upon the experience of Parties, it has drawn upon the inputs from a whole range of Parties, it has drawn upon the scientific basis; and we have, as the Chair mentioned, very complete reports setting out the methodologies for the indicators proposed.



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Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity
413 Saint-Jacques Street, Suite 800
Montreal, QC, H2Y 1N9, Canada
Tel : +1 514 288 2220 | secretariat@cbd.int
www.cbd.int



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I encourage you to make full use of the work that the AHTEG has achieved, to build on this work, to focus perhaps your interventions and your negotiations on the draft decision and trust the work of this important process that has already been guided by the COP and this Body. You also have before you a paper looking at the scientific and technical tools available to support implementation and achievement of the various targets of the Framework. This builds on the mandate from COP 15 and also from SBSTTA 25.

You see that we have a lot of tools available, there is no excuse for inaction. There's also the opportunity, of course, to continue working, including working with our partner organisations, to further develop tools where there are gaps, and to use this as an opportunity to mainstream the biodiversity agenda in the agendas of other Bodies.

Other work that is before you, that has been well prepared by Ad Hoc Technical Expert Groups, concerns the horizon scanning on synthetic biology and the guidelines on risk assessment and risk management for living modified organisms containing engineered gene drives, including those to control the inheritance patterns of mosquitoes.

I think we can be very proud of the work that has been undertaken under the auspices of this Body through these technical expert groups. The work available before you, I believe, represents the cutting edge on the science policy interface and it demonstrates the continued relevance of this Convention and of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. Finally, we have important work on biodiversity and health and on marine and coastal biodiversity.

I will echo the remarks just now of the Executive Director on these issues and on their importance. Let's keep the momentum to implement The Biodiversity Plan. Let's keep the spirit of multilateralism that prevailed at COP 15 that led to the adoption of The Biodiversity Plan. Let's work together to achieve success this week. I thank you very much for your attention.



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Montreal, QC, H2Y 1N9, Canada
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