

## **High-Level Event to celebrate World Wild Life Day, 2020**

**Theme: “Sustaining Life on Earth”**

**Remarks by  
Ambassador K. Nagaraj Naidu,  
Deputy Permanent Representative**

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### **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen**

I would like to thank the CITES Secretariat for organizing today’s event. The theme of World Wildlife Day 2020, “Sustaining all life on earth”, calls upon for a balance between human’s own needs and those of the interlinked and interdependent wild fauna and flora with which they live on this planet.

### **Excellencies,**

Every year, the environment provides about \$125 trillion in free services, for example pollination, water filtration, oxygen production and flood protection. This is worth more than the entire global GDP.

The planet is like a bank account where every living thing pays in deposits, but we are the one species that somehow is entitled to an overdraw facility. Our overuse of our natural resources is costing us \$6 trillion every year. By 2050, those costs could rise to \$28 trillion.

Over the last century, we have become out of balance with nature. Today, 96% of mammals are human beings and our domesticated livestock. Only 4% accounts for everything else, from elephants to tigers to pangolins. 70% of birds are our domesticated poultry, mostly chicken. In the ocean, 90% of the large fish – from sharks to tuna to cod – have been removed in the last hundred years. And 40% of insect species in the world are now endangered, too. The threats to bee colonies around the world have been well publicized. What happens to bees, bats or birds has a direct effect on our shopping baskets.

The biggest drivers of biodiversity loss on land are agriculture, and livestock farming and ranching. As the world's population continues to grow, we must figure out how to produce more food without destroying the planet's ecosystems.

However, the urgency of securing humanity's right to food trumped the necessity to preserve our planet. We now produce more than enough to feed all of humankind, yet over 820 million still go hungry, an equal number are obese. Meanwhile, species and genetic resources are falling prey to population growth, rampant urbanization, unsustainable consumption patterns, deforestation and climate change.

Around the world, persistent hunger is accompanied by an oversupply of empty calories and the spread of nutrient-poor diets. To a large extent, biodiversity loss is a by-product of our willingness to allocate ever more land to grow too much of too few things. About 75% of the world's food is generated from only 12 plants and five animal species. Mono-cultures such as sugar cane, maize, soybeans and rice are colonizing the global food supply, not just robbing us of gastronomic variety but our bodies of essential nutrients. Entire food cultures are being lost.

Traditional agriculture systems are still providing food for some two billion people today. They also sustain biodiversity, livelihoods, practical knowledge and culture. Up to 75% of the seeds needed to produce the world's diverse food crops are held by small farmers. This global agricultural heritage needs to be recognized and supported in ways that allow it to continue evolving for the present and future generations.

## **Excellencies,**

India is one of the mega-biodiversity countries of the world. Despite supporting a population of 1.3 billion on 2.4% of the world's land area, we contribute to about 8% of the known global biodiversity. In India for ages, conservation of wildlife and habitats has been part of our cultural ethos, which encourages compassion and co-existence. We have made efforts to increase our forest cover, which currently stands at 21.67% of the total geographical area of the country.

India's focused species conservation programmes have begun to show encouraging results. Today, with 2,967 tigers, India has 70% of the world's

tiger population. We have also taken initiatives for conservation of the Asian elephant, the Snow Leopard, the Asiatic Lion, one-horned rhinoceros, and the Great Indian Bustard. We have also adopted a 'National Action Plan for conservation of Migratory Birds along the Central Asian Flyway'.

## **Excellencies,**

Biodiversity loss should be tackled holistically, as part of overarching policy packages that combine incentives for sustainable agriculture, the fight against rural poverty, measures to advance food security, and climate change adaptation and mitigation. Agro-ecology and agro-forestry, as well as biodiversity-friendly practices in fisheries and aquaculture, must become the norm. Conservation efforts should involve local communities with demonstrably sustainable approaches to agriculture and forest management. They must be empowered to design local micro-policies that promote both ecosystems and diverse diets.

Science tells us that, if we are to prevent mass extinction and the collapse of our life support system, and if we are to avert a climate catastrophe, we need to keep half of the planet in a natural state.

Biodiversity, needs to be recognized as a major source of resilience to climate change and disasters, and the key to poverty alleviation, food security, health and wellbeing. It's not about having a utilitarian approach to conservation. It's about placing healthy ecosystems where they belong, right at the centre of the sustainability agenda. Only when this happens will we see significant improvements in the state of our planet's biodiversity.

Let's hope 2020, the " Biodiversity super year" offers some much-needed respite and direction.