

Press Statement

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The Earth's Environment is at a Crossroads. Solutions Exist. The Time for Action is Now.

- The health, prosperity, and well-being of people everywhere is at stake. Our future depends on whether individuals, communities, countries, and the global community take action to be better stewards of our planet.
- Biodiversity is being lost, ecosystems are being degraded, and human-induced climate change continues, both on the land and in the ocean – all driven by an increasing population coupled with unsustainable consumption patterns.
- Climate change threatens biodiversity and ecosystems and the loss of biodiversity and degradation of ecosystems in turn affects climate, hence both need to be addressed together.
- Few if any countries will achieve the majority of the Aichi biodiversity targets, and even if all the pledges of the Paris climate agreement were realized, holding the increase in global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels will not be achieved and, without stronger action, the Earth's climate is likely to rise by more than 3°C.
- Loss of biodiversity and rapid climate change affect people in numerous ways, but especially our health, economies, national security, and opportunities for sustainable development. In short, they determine our well-being and the ability to achieve the seventeen UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- Fortunately, many solutions exist and are beginning to be implemented. However, these solutions are not yet at the scale needed to affect the global trajectory.
- These solutions point to opportunities where changes in awareness, policy, use of technology, and behavior can safeguard the Earth's environment while eliminating poverty, ensuring healthy lives, and achieving food, water and energy security for all.
- The time for action is now.

There is no doubt that the Earth's environment is at a crossroads and that the time for action is now. We know that policies and technologies exist to safeguard the environment that are cost effective and socially acceptable, but the question is whether there is the public and political will to address them.

Biodiversity continues to be lost at the genetic, species and ecosystem levels in both marine and terrestrial systems at unprecedented rates. The atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide now exceeds over 400ppmv and 2017 was the warmest year on record, with an ever increasing number of extreme weather events.

In the last few years there have been a series of monumental political agreements that should be applauded: (i) the Convention on Biological Diversity Aichi targets; (ii) the Paris Agreement for Climate Change; and (iii) the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Each represents very positive efforts to address the complex problems.

The seventeen UN Sustainable Development Goals, which apply to all countries, would, if implemented in an integrated fashion by all countries, allow the world to develop in a socially, environmentally and economically sustainable manner. They cover the full range of critical issues ranging from climate change and terrestrial and marine biodiversity, to food, water and energy security, human health, gender, sustainable production and consumption, and peace and security.

The problem is that while Governments have pledged to safeguard biodiversity and ecosystems through the twenty Aichi targets, and to limit human-induced climate change to less than 2°C relative to pre-industrial levels, their individual and collective actions are totally inadequate and, without stronger actions, these aspirational targets will not be met.

We believe there are untapped opportunities to help citizens, business leaders, political leaders and others be more aware of the reasons why stronger action will benefit them and the actions that would achieve the results needed. One key point is that the loss of biodiversity and human-induced climate are much more than environmental issues; they are also social, economic, security and development issues. The continued loss of biodiversity and a changing climate will undermine the ability of all countries to achieve most of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Biodiversity and ecosystems provide essential life-support services that people often take for granted. For example, they provide benefits like food, fiber, clean water, and medicines; they regulate floods, air and water quality, pollination, and the Earth's climate. Biodiversity and ecosystems also have strong cultural importance for many societies through learning and inspiration, physical and psychological experiences, and a sense of place. Both human-induced climate change and loss of biodiversity threaten (1) food and water supplies; (2) human health through heat stress, vector- and water-borne diseases; (3) coastal communities due to sea level rise and loss of mangroves, kelp forests or coral reefs which can help absorb storm surge; and (4) social cohesion and peace. In other words, the loss of biodiversity and human-induced climate change are issues central to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Another key point is that viable solutions exist to mitigate and adapt to these threats to human well-being. There is no doubt that the world can move to a low-carbon economy by transitioning the production of energy from a fossil fuel economy based on coal, oil and gas to one based primarily on renewable energy technologies, together with a more efficient use of energy in the buildings, transportation and industry sectors. The cost of renewable energy technologies, especially solar and wind, have decreased drastically in the last decade, which coupled together with significant advances in storage technologies enhance the utility of intermittent renewable energy sources of energy. These advances, mean that energy emissions of carbon dioxide can be drastically reduced over the next few decades.

However, to reach the aspirational goals of the Paris climate agreement, i.e., “to hold the increase in global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels”, will require Governments to significantly strengthen their commitments. Businesses and citizens have key roles to play, both in taking action themselves and in supporting stronger action by their governments. Actions to reduce energy emissions of carbon dioxide need to be coupled with reductions in agricultural emissions of methane and nitrous oxide, and emissions of carbon dioxide associated with deforestation.

Sustainable fisheries are key to food security as well as healthy, delicious food. Current unsustainable levels and methods of fishing are destroying the capacity of the ocean to produce abundant seafood. Recent experiences have demonstrated that if fisheries are reformed in an enlightened fashion, depleted fisheries can be rebuilt and can produce much greater amounts of fish than are currently caught. Smart fishery policies can result in more seafood on plates, higher profits and healthier ocean ecosystems. The keys to successful fishery policies are well understood but need to be implemented. The creation of fully protected marine parks is a proven complement to fishery reform and is vital to protecting biodiversity and habitats as well as providing resilience to climate changes.

Reducing the rate of deforestation and restoration of degraded ecosystems are not only essential for limiting human-induced climate change but also for reducing the loss of biodiversity. Biodiversity and

ecosystems can be protected through the establishment of terrestrial and marine protected areas, and mainstreaming biodiversity concerns into agriculture, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture using a wide range of legal and regulatory, rights-based, economic and financial, and social and cultural policy instruments. Success will require using an integrated approach cutting across different policy sectors, the involvement of the full range of stakeholders, and innovative governance strategies.

Time is not on our side. If we fail to act now, future generations will inherit a much poorer world, and will wonder why we pillaged the environment with no forethought for them when socially and economically acceptable policies, technologies and practices were available.