



ECOSOC

United Nations Economic and Social Council

TAKING ACTION TO IMPROVE LIVES

Statement by His Excellency Munir Akram,
President of ECOSOC
at the Opening of the United Nations Summit on Biodiversity
30 September 2020, 10:00am
General Assembly Hall

Mr. President of the General Assembly,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Heads of State and Government,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege to speak at this Summit on Biodiversity in my capacity as President of the Economic and Social Council.

Mr. President

2. It was a bio-diverse and hospitable planet which accommodated the emergence and evolution of the human species – providing nutrition food, clean air, fresh water, rich oceans,

natural medicines and bountiful raw materials. It allowed humankind to survive, grow, prosper and build great civilizations.

3. Our great prophets and holy books prescribed not only respect for each other, but also for nature and its bounties. Unfortunately, in the modern era we have severely abused nature.

4. In the past 50 years, the human population has doubled, the global economy has grown nearly fourfold and global trade has grown tenfold, together driving up the demand for energy, raw materials and much else. Many types of pollution are increasing, with negative impacts for nature. Seventy-five percent of the planet's land surface has been significantly altered, 66 per cent of the ocean area is experiencing increasing cumulative impacts, and over 85 per cent of wetlands have been lost. Approximately half the live coral cover on reefs has disappeared since the 1870s, with accelerating losses in recent decades due to climate change.

5. The Secretary General has just said _____ with nature and as he said on a previous occasion "Nature is fighting back".

6. The impact of global warming and climate change are visible. Yet, the impacts of biodiversity loss will be equally pervasive and equally devastating for the future of humanity.

7. It is scientifically proven that loss of biological diversity increases the risk of zoonotic diseases. The COVID-19 pandemic is a grain reminder of the relationship between people and nature. And if the humble bees become extinct, agricultural production will be devastated. Once despoiled, our rivers and oceans will no longer yield plentiful bounties. If our forests diminish further, and carbon emissions are unabsorbed, masks may become a permanent feature of our existence.

8. It is, therefore, tragic that none of the 20 Aichi Biodiversity targets will be met by the 2020 timeline. In fact, data reveals a further regression in the fight to preserve biodiversity and ensure the sustainable use of nature.

9. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are integrated and interlinked. If the biodiversity goals are not achieved, most of the other goals will also be difficult to realize by 2030.

10. It is high time to discard the economic models that are driving States to fight nature, and each other. It is time to transition to a new economic and social paradigm which values the preservation of nature as much if not more than gross national product and per capita incomes, which enshrines sustainability as an integral part of the development paradigm.

11. I hope that implementation of the Aichi targets will become an integral part of the national SDG strategies of all countries. I trust this will be fully reflected in their Voluntary National Reviews this year in ECOSOC. We will also endeavour in ECOSOC's Development Cooperation Forum to align the UN's development system more closely with the biodiversity targets. And, in the Youth Forum this year, we shall try to mobilize the energy of young people to serve their future by fighting for nature, rather than against it.

Excellencies,

12. In combating the COVID-19 pandemic and the great

recession it has triggered; in eradicating poverty; in installing sustainable infrastructure, finance is the key. It can be mobilized if there is the political will to do so. In promoting the biodiversity goals, the central requirement is not finance, it is only political will. The will to take critical decisions to end the rape of nature, and to contain the economic greed and policy negligence that are driving humanity to destroy the hospitality of our planet.

13. Such political will can be mobilized collectively by the world's leaders. This is why this Summit is timely. Indeed, it is up existential important.

I thank you.