

Our Solutions are in Nature – Ambitions for our Planet

Virtual High-Level Discussion on the Int’l Day for Biological Diversity

**Intervention by
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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to thank all the organizers for today’s event.

The structure and functions of any ecosystem are resilient only to the extent of the species diversity found in that ecosystem.

Ecosystem integrity underlines human health and development.

The co-dependent web of life can collapse within a very short time if its components are eroded one by one.

The increasing overlapping of boundaries between humans and wildlife has resulted in new environmental conditions that favour particular hosts, vectors, and/or pathogens and consequently the main drivers for the emergence of zoonotic diseases.

Excellencies,

India had the privilege of hosting the UN Biodiversity Conference in 2012, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in September 2019 and earlier in February 2020, we hosted the 13th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS COP13) to focus on adopting actions to help reverse the decline of migratory species.

The CMS COP13 was supposed to kick off ‘nature and biodiversity super year’. However, 2020 has not been the super year that we all thought. The only way to build back better is to step up action to conserve species, protect ecosystems and make meaningful progress towards achieving the SDGs.

The shared experience of the pandemic should encourage greater international collaboration and solidarity for a better future.

Excellencies,

India with just 2.4% of the world's land area contributes to about 8% of the known global biodiversity.

India is one of the 17 megadiverse countries in the world that harbour the majority of earth's endemic species. Out of 35 biodiversity hotspots in the world, India has 4 biodiversity hotspots.

To turn the tide on the loss of biodiversity, we need a transformational change in the way in which we produce and consume food. We also need to conserve and manage forests and trees within an integrated landscape approach, and we need to repair the damage done through forest restoration effort.

Abrupt losses of biodiversity from climate change represent a significant threat to human well-being. In many countries a large percentage of people rely on their immediate natural environment for their food security and income. Sudden disruption of local ecosystems would negatively affect their ability to earn an income and feed themselves, potentially pushing them into poverty.

Close to 30% of India's population directly derives its livelihood from immediate biodiversity in the country. The value chain of trade of biological resources and their derivatives like medicinal plants, extracts of medicinal plants, fishes, processed food and pharma industry, are responsible for creating jobs for probably another 30% population of the country. Biological resources are at the centre of local cultures like conservation of sacred groves spread all across India.

Conservation of wildlife and habitats has been part of India's cultural ethos, which encourages compassion and co-existence. Despite hosting 18% of the planet's population, we have also made India home to 74% of the world's tiger population through our focused conservation efforts.

India has been championing the cause of "climate action" through conservation, sustainable lifestyle and green development model. India will continue to implement forward-looking policies to strengthen the framework of community forestry and secure ecological security. At the UNCCD, India has committed to restoring at least 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030. We are working on a New Forest Policy (NFP), which is currently under review. Our objective through the NFP is to revamp forest conservation and management, enrichment and sustainable management of forest resources, safeguarding ecological stability, and addressing the concerns related to climate change.

Yesterday along with UNEP, India launched the initiative called 'Not all Animals Migrate by Choice'. The initiative is aimed at putting an end to illegal Trafficking of Endangered Species and to raise awareness and advocate solutions.

Excellencies,

The loss of biodiversity underpins the health of the planet and has a direct impact on our present and future life.

As Mahatma Gandhi would put it, the earth, the air, the land and the water are not an inheritance from our fore fathers but on loan from our future generations.