

## Special Invited Speech at the Opening Ceremony

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### **Excellencies, honourable delegates, ladies and gentlemen,**

We meet in what may prove to be a remarkable year in terms of humanity's relationship with the rich and varied life on Earth or in shorthand biological diversity, biodiversity for short.

Only two weeks ago, nations across the world meeting in Nagoya under the UNEP-administered Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) took a range of decisions-ones that may go down in history as a moment when we re-discovered the true value of the planet's natural or nature-based assets.

A moment when governments but also the private sector; cities and citizens may be said to have started to return and restore nature back to its pivotal and central role in the lives and livelihoods of six billion people.

2010, designated as the UN's International Year of Biodiversity, had embarked as a year of sobering and some might say frustrating and even depressing reality.

Not one country had met the target of substantially reversing the rate of loss of biodiversity.

A fact that probably surprised few.

Over the past few decades assessment after assessment- such as the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment- have reported that far too many of the dials on the Earth's life support systems have been pushing inexorably towards and in some cases into the red.

In May the Global Biodiversity Outlook-3, compiled by the CBD with support from partners including UNEP, talked of 'tipping points' fast approaching that in turn could prove irreversible for ecosystems such as coral reefs to freshwaters.

### **CBD-Signals of Optimism**

Yet, in the early hours of Saturday morning 30 October the global community turned



pessimism on its head.

New targets for 2020 were agreed including extending the area of land under protection to 17 per cent and a re-affirmation of a 10 per cent target for the marine environment.

Other elements of the extensive Strategic plan include, by 2020, lifting the extinction risk from known threatened species.

The meeting agreed to study resource mobilization for assisting developing countries to meet the new targets in the plan based on a methodology that relates support to needs and gaps.

Governments also agreed to a protocol on an international regime on access and benefit sharing of genetic resources-the missing pillar of the CBD.

The Protocol, which is the result of lays down basic ground rules on how nations cooperate in obtaining genetic resources from animals to plants and fungi.

It also outlines how the benefits, arising for example when a plant's genetics are turned into a commercial product such as a pharmaceutical, are shared with the countries and communities who have conserved and managed that resource often for millennia.

## What Has Changed?

How did this sea change occur? In many ways it echoes to the theme of this session and of the China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development in 2010.

Let me suggest several reasons.

## Evolving Science

Firstly, the science has evolved rapidly over the past decades. It underlines that many of the risks glimpsed in 1992 when the CBD and its sister treaties-the climate change and desertification conventions-were established, are rapidly becoming realities.

One reason why governments, meeting in the Republic of Korea earlier in the year, gave the green light to an Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)-a kind of IPCC for nature.

A green light that was backed at the CBD and which is now before the 65th session of the UN General Assembly.

## Evolving Economics

The second crucial driver is the economics-perhaps the persistent 'missing link' towards catalyzing and accelerating a definitive international response.

During the CBD, the final synthesis report of The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) - a partnership hosted by UNEP - was published.

Economists and ecologists in China have played an active and engaged role along with colleagues across the globe.

- If deforestation continues at present rates to 2050, the world will lose \$2 trillion-\$4.5 trillion of natural capital per year

And what would it cost to replace certain natural services - even if we could.

- Insect pollinators, including bees, provide services worth an estimated 153 billion Euros annually representing close to 10 per cent of the world's agricultural output for human food

TEEB is also showcasing where some communities and countries are recognizing nature's value.

- In Vietnam, for example planting and protecting nearly 12000 hectares of mangroves has cost just over \$1 million but saved annual expenditure on dyke maintenance of well over \$7 million.

## Evolving National Responses

And here perhaps is the third point. While the global targets have not been met, many countries have in some 'sectors' of this nature economy been acting rather than idling.

Here in China for example, 20 million hectares of forest cover was achieved between 2000 and 2005 as part of longer term targets.

In June this year, in support of UNEP's work on ecosystems management and TEEB, we published a new report on the cost effectiveness of ecosystem restoration or renovation in which Lake Hong was cited.

- Banning unsustainable fishing methods; re-introductions of native fish species and re-planting of native aquatic grasses have transformed the once highly polluted and degraded Lake Hong in China
- Since 2003, water quality has improved dramatically, rare birds like the Oriental White Stork have returned after 20 years and fisher folk have seen incomes triple-\$5.50 higher than the national average.

The recently completed-but I understand now to be extended-UNEP/Global Environment Facility partnership to save the endangered Siberian Crane by supporting conservation of the birds flyways, has delivered significant ecosystem benefits too in China but also Siberia and Iran.

- Specifically catalyzing the conservation and rehabilitation of wetlands covering



some 7 million hectares -ecosystems of high environmental and economic importance.

The economic choices brought to the fore by TEEB also feeds directly into UNEP's Green Economy Initiative.

The Green Economy, which is one of the two themes for the upcoming Rio+20 meeting in Brazil, is assembling from across the globe the smart policy-instruments and market mechanisms to further unleash investments.

It is also showcasing where perhaps the global economy is wasting money and perversely contributing to environmental degradation - money that could be better spent on supporting the agenda of the CBD and other biological conventions.

In May UNEP spotlighted the economic, social and environmental contradictions of fisheries subsidizes and their role in fueling the depletion of fish stocks.

- A Green Economy approach would invest \$8 billion of the estimated \$27 billion-worth of subsidizes in areas such as Marine Protected Areas and tradable fish quotas.
- This could actually raise catches to 112 million tonnes annually while triggering benefits to industry, consumers and the global economy totaling US\$1.7 trillion over the next 40 years
- Raise total income of fishing households, including those engaged in artisanal fishing, from US\$35 billion to around US\$44 billion a year while also assisting in fighting poverty by securing a primary source of protein for close to one billion people

TEEB and the Green Economy are both bringing evidence to oft said statement that nature is the wealth of the less well off.

- Between close to 50 per cent and 90 per cent of the GDP of the poor - effectively the total source of livelihoods of rural and forest-dwelling poor households - are provided by ecosystems and other non-marketed goods

So ladies and gentlemen,

There is certainly a renewed vigour towards understanding and action on ecosystems and biodiversity within green development such that instead of missing targets, there may be the opportunity to realize them by the new deadline of 2020.

## Making the Links-Climate and Nature

The key will rest in part on capturing the links between more intelligent ecosystem management and other challenges such as combating poverty and climate change.

This is in part emerging through Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD or REDD+).

Here funding conservation of developing country forests opens up the opportunity to play a key role in both climate change mitigation and reversing the loss of biodiversity while perhaps generating new streams of incomes and livelihood opportunities for local people.

UNEP is currently working with Indonesia on so called Blue Carbon-by some estimates mangroves, seagrasses and salt marshes are soaking up up to half of all the world's transport emissions.

China, along with Kenya, Niger and Nigeria is a partner in a new UNEP GEF Carbon Benefits project.

This is evaluating how different forms of land management including farming methods contribute to locking carbon away in soils and vegetation-a first step towards paying for sustainable land management in a similar way to the emerging REDD mechanism.

Ladies and gentlemen,

## Embedding and Scaling Up

The ultimate aim must be to translate this rapidly emerging body of science, pilot projects and economics into the centre of national economic policy making so that choices in terms of development are made with the fullest and widest picture.

Only then will the economic mistakes of the past-made in part because of blind spots on the real value of nature-be corrected and the possibility for transformation mature and be scaled up.

The good news is that this is also underway. At CBD, Brazil and India announced plans for national TEEBs and others including Japan and the European Union signaled interest too.

The Asian Development Bank has also indicated interest in a continent-wide study.

Meanwhile UNEP has green economy advisory service requests from just under 30 countries and organizations.

The World Bank, with partners including UNEP, is also now spearheading a green accounting initiative with initially around 10 developing countries including Colombia and Mexico.

The fact that this year's CCIED is addressing these themes underlines growing interest here too in China, building as it does on this country's earmarking of a significant slice of its stimulus package in environmental areas and forward-looking policies that have encouraged a significant growth in for example renewable energy.

UNEP in partnership with China's Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Environment



Protection, State Forest Administration, Chinese Academy of Science, and many others, is to expand its support to national and regionally executed GEF funded programs.

Themes include:-

- Incorporating TEEB in the planning and implementation of 12 provincial National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs).
- "Security of genetic resources" -combining the concepts of Access and Benefit Sharing of genetic resources, invasive species management and agro-biodiversity initiatives
- Management and securing minimum ecological flows of water in wetlands under climate change stress in north-east China and regional river systems such as the Mekong, Kailash Himalayas transboundary area as a follow up to the good practices of the Siberian Crane Wetland Project

Over the past century, humanity had perhaps evolved the illusion that it had escaped and advanced beyond the need for and dependency on nature.

2010 may go down in the history books as a year when that illusion was finally unmasked as false.

And where the invisibility of the economic, alongside the social and spiritual dimensions of natural systems, became visible again with a new and fresh clarity.

2010 may also have triggered an opportunity for realizing a low carbon, resource efficient, Green Economy and green development path for developing and developed economies alike.

A path that recognizes the importance of the need for sustainability in hard infrastructure such as transport and energy systems, but also the soft infrastructure-from forests and fresh waters to coral reefs and mangroves right up to the atmosphere.

A path that opens up the chance to deliver sustainable development for six billion, rising to nine billion people whether they live in countries with more state-led policies or more market-led ones.

And in doing so, opens up a way to take the hope and the promise of the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 and convert this into more decisive, equitable and transformational actions now, up to and beyond Rio+20 in two years time.

Thank you!