



UNEP Global Ministerial Environment Forum

High Level Panel Session on Rio+20: From Outcome to Implementation

Statement by Zhang Xinsheng
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Madam Chairperson,
Excellencies Ministers,
Mr Achim Steiner, Executive Director of UNEP,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to begin by expressing my sincere thanks to Achim Steiner, the Executive Director of UNEP, for inviting me to participate in this event.

Secondly, I would like to say how happy I feel to be in Kenya, as my first trip to Africa in my new capacity as the President of the International Union for Conservation of Nature – **IUCN**. The hospitality I have felt since I arrived here is confirming everything I have heard about this beautiful country: warm and welcoming.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A few months ago, the Rio+20 conference concluded and one of its significant achievements as reflected in the land mark “**The Future We Want**” Outcome document was the agreement to develop a set of universal **Sustainable Development Goals**. In the time accorded to me during this panel session, I will try to share with you some thoughts about this task, as a contribution from IUCN, the world's oldest and largest nature conservation network.

The current scientific evidence is unequivocal: our survival on this planet and eradication of poverty is dependent on the life-support systems provided by nature. Biodiversity and the ecosystems services that it provides underpin our economies and our civilizations. All of us, but in particular the world's poor, depend on the essential resources that healthy biodiversity and ecosystems provide as underlined by the World Bank in its landmark report *Where is the Wealth of Nations?* The report also suggests that natural capital is an important share of total wealth in low-income countries and that managing natural resources must be a key part of development strategies. As we all know, social capital is also an essential component to the Wealth of Nations and there can be no genuine sustainable development if it is not aimed at alleviating poverty and redressing social inequities. As stated in the *Human Development Report* of 2011 prepared by UNDP, promoting equitable development entails addressing local, national and global sustainability. The concept of '**Green Economy**' that was also addressed in the Rio+20 Outcome document has to be oriented towards improving social equity while taking into account the limits that should not be trespassed when we exploit nature – in other words, what the community of ecologists call the '**planetary boundaries**'.

The Sustainable Development Goals process presents a unique opportunity to address these challenges. Because of the importance of this task, it needs to encompass all tracks of dialogues: dialogues between governments, dialogues between governments and civil society, and dialogues between peoples from different civilizations and cultures. I dare to say that the role of civil society is crucial in this process because civil society can support governments in several ways, including: bringing coherence in the negotiations; assisting in the implementation of adopted obligations through the development and application of tools and policies; gathering data to inform policy makers and providing the relevant expertise.

The Millennium Development Goals have opened the path for the international community as a whole to move further ahead into a more sustainable economic and social development. However, allow me to say that in many people's views, the third pillar of sustainable development, namely, the environmental sustainability dimension, has been the one where the good intentions that reached a peak at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit have not translated sufficiently in concrete actions. If we had been more successful, for example, the climate change and the biodiversity loss challenges which are continuing un-halted would be of lesser dimensions than what we are still experiencing. The Sustainable Development Goals should therefore be an opportunity and a vehicle to further the integration of the three

pillars of Sustainable Development by looking at nature and the services it provides for human well being as a critical asset for social and economic development. In this regard, the vision that IUCN would like to share with the global community is one of “*a just world that values and conserves nature for a sustainable future*”.

To achieve this vision, there are some critical considerations that need to be taken into account in shaping the Sustainable Development Goals:

- a) First, we need to ensure that the imperative to conserve and sustainably use nature is put at the center of our concerns. Nature must be perceived as real capital, an asset and a pre-requisite for socio-economic development, rather than an impediment to it. Well managed, healthy and diverse ecosystems and the biological resources they encompass are indispensable for sustainable development. Nature can contribute solutions to global challenges in food, water and energy security, climate change, and poverty eradication. The Sustainable Development Goals framework should therefore incorporate a **nature-based solutions approach** anchored on existing data which proves that nature, when properly invested in and well managed, increases social and economic resilience and generates benefits. The Sustainable Development Goals should be an opportunity to replicate and scale up such successful actions. All stakeholders who engage in the SDGs process should ensure that environmental sustainability does not become a standalone goal confined in itself, but rather a key element which cuts across all the goals.
- b) Secondly, when shaping the SDGs, we need to build on existing commitments already made. One such commitment is the **Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020** and its Aichi Biodiversity Targets adopted in Nagoya in 2010 by the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. The Aichi Targets address core areas of Sustainable Development, with **Target 2** explicitly requiring governments, to integrate by 2020 biodiversity values into national and local development and poverty reduction strategies and planning processes. The majority of the countries of the world committed to fulfill the Aichi Targets and the biodiversity-related conventions have joined the CBD and embraced the Strategic Plan as an overarching framework for common action. This Plan should therefore be integrated to the set of sustainable development goals to be agreed to and implemented in the next decades.
- c) Thirdly, it will be essential that the SDGs are **based on scientific and rigorous interdisciplinary assessment** of the latest evolution in economic, social and

environmental areas and how these areas relate to each other for the sustainability and resilience of our societies and our economies. It will be important to engage the scientific community in the process of defining the **SDGs and monitoring their implementation**. Existing experts' panels and platforms, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the newly established Intergovernmental science-policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) should be drawn upon, as well as inputs from all relevant knowledge systems, including those of indigenous and local communities.

IUCN with its large world-wide network of Members and Commissions, spanning all sectors of society, united in a common goal of conserving nature because of its vital role for sustaining our livelihoods and for human wellbeing, will continue to be at UNEP's side and to be a reliable partner for all governments in this critical journey towards sustainable development. The **knowledge products** that IUCN generates can be a valuable asset of particular relevance in this effort, as they are already used by several governments to assess the state of their biodiversity. The **nature-based solutions** approach that we are championing is a proven cost-effective way of providing part of the solution to some of the global challenges faced by mankind especially in regard of food security and climate change. IUCN, with its global reach through its unique membership which encompass governments as well as non-governmental constituencies, stands ready to work with UNEP and all governments to make the Sustainable Development Goals a robust framework that must be a vehicle to lead to the **transformative change needed to protect and sustain life on Planet Earth, the home we all share**.

Madam Chair,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before concluding my statement, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate UNEP for the establishment of the universal membership in its governing council. We welcome this decision and consider it as a major step towards strengthening UNEP through a wider legitimacy.

I thank you for your kind attention.