



**Meeting of the General Assembly Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals  
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**European Union and its Member States**

**“Oceans and seas, forests and biodiversity”**

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the EU and its Member States. The full statement will be made available on the website.

The EU and its Member States wish to underline the importance of the conservation and sustainable management of biodiversity and important global ecosystems such as forests or oceans and seas, as a foundation for social and economic development and human well-being that provide important ecosystem services and are essential for the achievement of sustainable development and poverty eradication. They also contribute to basic living standards and promote transformation towards a green economy.

**Oceans and seas** cover 71% of the Earth's surface and are critical to sustaining life on Earth, including for the provision of food, oxygen and water and the moderation of climate. They are of universal importance because of the resources and the ecosystem services they provide, and are particularly crucial for coastal states, including Small Island Development States. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea provides the legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and their resources. The sustainable management of human activities impacting oceans and seas and coastal areas is necessary to ensure the provision of many economic and social benefits and ecosystem services to humankind. Oceans and seas are increasingly responsible for the creation of wealth and jobs – including fisheries and aquaculture, shipping, tourism, biotechnologies and pharmaceuticals, and a range of energy sources, including renewables. However, unsustainable fishing practices put food security and income generation at risk, especially of the poor. Oceans and seas are important components of the post 2015 development agenda, and are also closely related to a range of other priority areas such as water and governance, as well as climate change.

*Some key challenges on oceans and seas which deserve to be addressed in a targeted and coherent manner include:*

As agreed at Rio+20, it should be ensured that our seas and oceans are clean, healthy, productive and resilient to external impacts including climate change and acidification, by applying an ecosystem approach and the precautionary principle to the management of human activities. Marine and coastal biodiversity should be maintained, and species and habitats from coral reefs and mangroves to the Arctic ecosystems, should be protected and restored,

notably through the establishment of marine protected areas, including in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

We need to address marine pollution, including chemicals and nutrients, as well as invasive alien species. We want to highlight the growing concerns on marine litter, which is mainly a consequence of poor waste management, both in land and at sea. Our agreed objective is to achieve significant reductions of marine litter by 2025 and to prevent harm to coastal and marine environment.

A main priority is achieving sustainable fisheries, which includes combating overfishing and minimizing environmental impacts. This also requires meeting the 2015 target, as reiterated at Rio+20, to maintain or restore fish stocks at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield on an urgent basis. Furthermore, oceans and seas governance should be improved so that illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing is prevented and eliminated. There is also a need to promote sustainable aquaculture practices to ensure food security without jeopardizing marine ecosystems. Access to fisheries and to markets by subsistence, small-scale and artisanal fishers and women fish workers, particularly in developing countries and Small Island Developing States, needs to be ensured. The post-2015 framework is an opportunity to focus our actions on these interrelated challenges. The interrelations of oceans and seas with many other sustainable development challenges call for a more holistic approach to the sustainable management of natural resources and services provided by oceans and seas.

The EU and its Member States also want to highlight the importance that biodiversity and forests are fully integrated in the post-2015 development agenda.

**Biodiversity** - the variety of life on Earth – has a high intrinsic value and is the fundamental basis of our lives and livelihoods. It is our natural capital and should be protected and sustainably used. It is an essential element of earth's life support system and fundamental to the functioning of ecosystems and the provision of ecosystem services, such as clean water and clean air, food security, climate regulation, protection against climate change impacts, pollination, regulation of pests and diseases. The goods and services provided by biodiversity provide a critical foundation for sustainable development, poverty eradication and human well-being. These are especially important to the poorest and most vulnerable groups, as they are often directly dependent on biodiversity and ecosystems for their livelihoods. Agro-biodiversity that is essential for ensuring food security is under increasing pressure, and the sustainable management of chemicals, including pesticides, and waste is paramount in this regard.

Those challenges are universal. A comprehensive approach is provided by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Strategic Plan 2011-2020 and its Aichi biodiversity targets, to be implemented no later than 2020.

*On this basis, and looking ahead to the post-2015 development agenda, the following challenges need to be addressed:*

Ecosystems that provide essential services, including services related to food security and water, and contribute to health, livelihoods and well-being, should be restored and safeguarded, taking into account the role of indigenous and local communities and the role of women, as well as the needs of the poor and vulnerable groups.

The rate of loss of all natural habitats, including forests, should at least be halved and where feasible brought close to zero; degradation and fragmentation should be significantly reduced; the extinction of threatened species should be prevented and their conservation status should be improved and sustained.

Biodiversity values should be integrated into national and local development and poverty reduction strategies and planning processes and be incorporated into national accounting, as appropriate, and reporting systems.

Wildlife trafficking should be significantly reduced. To this end, the fight against illegal activities relating to biodiversity, notably illegal wildlife trade, poaching and illegal logging, which are facilitated by weak governance systems and which can threaten peace and stability, needs to be reinforced.

Biodiversity, including marine and forest ecosystems and agro-biodiversity, also needs to be mainstreamed into key development areas, including agriculture and food security, fisheries, aquaculture and forestry.

The opportunities that **forests** provide for sustainable development and poverty eradication can hardly be over-emphasized. Forests cover roughly 30% of the world's land area and provide a variety of products and ecosystem services that deliver social, environmental and economic benefits. More than 1.6 billion people depend to varying degrees on forests for their livelihoods, such as for fuel, medicinal plants and food and 200 million people directly depend on forests for their survival. Indeed many poor and vulnerable people depend directly on biodiversity and forests. Forests are amongst the most important habitats for biodiversity and provide crucial ecosystem services. Forests also capture and store significant amounts of CO<sub>2</sub>, thus contributing to climate change mitigation. They also prevent soil erosion, landslides and contribute to disaster risk reduction. From the economic perspective forests provide products in terms of biomass for renewable energy, timber for construction and non-timber by-products, and generate jobs and incomes, including to a large number of poor people in rural areas and thus contribute to the inclusive green economy.

At the same time, forests are vulnerable and their resources continue to be under threat from deforestation and degradation, with dramatic consequences for the environment and societies. According to the FAO 13 million hectares of forests are lost every year. This is mainly due to illegal logging, fires, agricultural and urban expansion, driven by constantly increasing population and demand for food and fibres, inter alia, and it is increased by weak governance.

Deforestation and forest degradation, notably of tropical forests, are responsible for 15 to 20% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Deforestation and forest degradation, together with climate change, have impacts on vulnerable mountain ecosystems, which play a crucial role in providing water resources, hosting biodiversity and preventing disasters in highlands as in lowlands.

*In relation to forests, several key issues need to be addressed to benefit from them sustainably, including in the long term:*

There is a need to ensure that forest areas are protected and managed sustainably, enhancing their multi-functional role, through the sustainable use of forests, their protection, restoration, through afforestation and reforestation, and the enhancement of forest-based economic as well as of social and environmental benefits.

We need to reverse the loss of forest cover worldwide and increase efforts to prevent forest degradation, halt the rate of loss of primary forests and increase significantly the areas of protected forests.

It is important to eliminate illegal logging, and associated trade, by strengthening forest governance frameworks, tenure rights and law enforcement, and increase the resource-wise use and the proportion of forest products from sustainably managed forests.

It is necessary to address the direct and indirect drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, including through the adoption of integrated land-use management and land planning.

It is important to address biodiversity and forests in their own right but also because they are interlinked with a range of other priority areas for the post-2015 development agenda, such as sustainable agriculture and food security, health, sustainable growth and jobs, climate change, water, and disaster prevention, gender equality, governance and rule of law, to name but a few. They are thus underpinning to and interconnected with the objectives of poverty eradication and sustainable development. These challenges can only be addressed through the adoption and implementation of a range of enabling policies that integrate in a coherent and balanced manner the three dimensions of sustainable development.