

Statement for Canada/Israel/US team on Conservation and sustainable use of marine resources, oceans and seas; Ecosystems and biodiversity

May 8, 2014

As delivered by Ambassador Elizabeth Cousens, US Ambassador to ECOSOC

Thank you, Mr. Co-chair.

Our team strongly supports a dedicated goal on marine resources, oceans and seas, which we believe is ripe for elevation in our agenda in its own right. We would only offer modest additional detail and refinement to ensure a focus on actionable, measurable outcomes.

We support Target 13A but would add specificity and focus by highlighting specifically the **“reduction of marine debris, particularly from plastics, and “reduction of nutrient effluent in order to reduce hypoxic zones.”** There are different percentages that could be attached, and we have specific recommendations in this regard, but for now we want just to emphasize the added specificity. This will address both fertilizer runoff and the substantial build-up of waste in marine areas.

Target 13B currently tackles two important issues, and we recommend separating them. We welcome a target on **“ocean acidification”** which could be formulated in a number of ways to which we are open. We would then incorporate the important issue of marine ecosystems into the target on Marine Protected Areas.

We strongly support proposed Target 13E on **“eliminating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and destructive fishing practices.”**

In Target 13F, we recommend adding specificity to **“conserve at least 10% of coastal and marine areas, including through establishing effectively managed Marine Protected Areas.”** Both coastal and marine ecosystems deserve special mention given their role as carbon sinks as well as breeding grounds for many marine species.

We support Target 13G to **“eliminate fishing subsidies which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing.”** Nearly 60% of the \$27 billion spent each year on fisheries subsidies supports unsustainable activities that lead to overfishing.

Finally, we are not persuaded that Target 13D adds much. As in virtually any area, governments should ensure full implementation of existing regimes that promote sustainable development but it’s not clear that we need a target to make this point, especially on an issue that is the subject of other processes.

Turning to focus area 14, **ecosystems and biodiversity**, we strongly support a strong goal in this area, additional to the integration of targets related to efficient and sustainable natural resource use and sustainable consumption and production patterns elsewhere in our agenda.

For this specific goal, we see the strongest targets in the following areas:

First, we strongly support a target on protecting threatened species and halting biodiversity loss. There are various ways to formulate a target in this area, some of which are stronger, more measurable, and more readily agreeable than others. We see scope to combine Target 14A and B along the following lines: “**Halt the loss, degradation, or fragmentation of all biodiversity, especially in the most biologically diverse ecosystems, and reverse the decline of populations of threatened and endangered species.**” This would include the point about ecosystems from Target B (and therefore also include habitats) and be more quantifiable than broad terms about “sustainable use” or broad “protections.” It would also obviate the need for a target about farmed species and wild relatives which would be better as an indicator for a more strategically encompassing target.

Second, we strongly support a target on forests. We believe Target 14d would be strengthened by reference to “**Reversing the loss of forest cover worldwide**” along with increasing reforestation by x%. We do not think the language about “ensure sustainable management” adds much compared to strong outcome measures. We also do not understand the link to mountain ecosystems here which we believe would be well covered by the reformulated Target 14A as noted.

Third, we support a target on land degradation and desertification, though we believe Target 14E could be strengthened by being more precise and measurable. We are open to an alternative proposal some have advocated that focuses on “**Improving soil quality, reducing soil erosion by x tons and combating desertification.**” However phrased, we recognize that this target will require more work to develop data – indeed, one of the benefits of a target in this area would be to drive improved data and analysis.

Fourth, we strongly support Target 14g to “**End poaching and trafficking of endangered species.**” The proliferation of poaching and trafficking undermines economic stability and communities that depend on wildlife for their livelihoods and contributes additionally to the spread of disease and organized crime. Currently, over 100 countries have developed Red Lists of Threatened Species, which could enable monitoring and measurability tools for species and ecosystem diversity.

Fifth, as noted earlier, we support a target on air pollution such as “**Reduce global deaths and illness from poor air quality by 50% by 2030.**” This could be either under a natural resources goal or a health goal. There is strong evidence that indoor and outdoor air pollution is a major risk factor for health in both developed and developing countries. As the World Health Organization has reported, 7 million people died in 2012 from exposure to air pollution, or one in eight total global deaths, and setting a strong target in this area would have multiple impacts across many sectors.

We also see scope for a target on integrating natural resources and biodiversity values into national and local planning and development processes. This could be explored also under a Governance and Institutions goal.

Finally, we would note targets that we do not believe are particularly strong: Target 14F on “genetic resources” addresses a significantly complex issue that is the ongoing subject of other international instruments and processes where there are still only nascent (and widely divergent) understandings about the nature, interpretation, and implications of various positions. Moreover, a target in this area would be almost impossible to measure. Target 14H on “invasive species” is too narrow, better captured by more strategic outcome-oriented targets, and also difficult to measure. Target 14I is important but overly prescriptive and focused on inputs or outputs rather than outcomes. Traditional knowledge and practices are sometimes, but not always, more sustainable. We do strongly support inclusion of indigenous and local communities in decision-making, however, which we will take up in the discussion about inclusive governance and institutions tomorrow.

Thank you.