

Statement by

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**Executive Secretary
Convention on Biological Diversity**

at the

Opening session of the fourth meeting

of the

**Ad Hoc Open-ended Inter-Sessional Working Group on Article 8(j) and
Related Provisions**

**Granada, Spain
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**Excellencies,
Mr. President,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen**

Never since the appearance of humans on Earth, have their impacts on the environment been as destructive as they have been during the past half century. Never before in human history has the loss of biodiversity been so great. The rate of loss now exceeds 100 times the natural rate. For some experts, the world is on the eve of its greatest extinction crisis. The capacity of ecosystems to meet the needs of future generations is being seriously compromised. Our planet is reaching the limit of its carrying capacity.

Efforts of an exceptional nature are therefore required to address this challenge. We have no alternative other than to fulfil the commitment taken by 154 Heads of State to substantially reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. We have only four years left to win the battle of life on Earth. To achieve this strategic target, we need the active engagement of all citizens of the world. It is for this reason that immediately after taking up my assignment as the new Executive Secretary of your Convention, I issued a message to all citizens of the world to join forces for the emergence of a new ethic, a sort of new code of conduct between Mother Nature and her sons and daughters.

To this end, indigenous and local communities have so much to offer and we have so much to learn from their age-old relationship with nature. The very origin of environmental conservation, sustainable use of biodiversity and the sharing of nature's benefits, namely the three objectives of our Convention, is found in ancient cultures throughout the world. Nature is at the heart of the cultures and values of traditional societies.

It is therefore with great pleasure and a unique honour that today, as one of my first official duties as newly appointed Executive Secretary of your Convention, I welcome you here for the opening of the fourth meeting of this Working Group, which was specially established to preserve and promote the traditional knowledge of indigenous and local communities.

In March 2000, Seville, that great city of the Kingdom of Spain, hosted the first meeting of our Working Group. Today another great city of Spain is hosting our fourth meeting. Our meeting takes place near the village of Guadix, one of the oldest human settlements in Spain. It is also taking place near the Parque de las Ciencias, a 30,000 square-metre open museum with 270 interactive activities exclusively devoted to nature and biodiversity. We are truly meeting today in one of the most prestigious of cities, redolent of the history and legacy of many great ancient civilizations, traditions and cultures. Our meeting this week in Granada is therefore of great significance.

I would like to pay tribute to Her Excellency Doña Cristina Narbona Ruiz, Minister of the Environment of Spain, to Doña Leire Pajín, Secretary of State for

International Cooperation, to Don José Torres, the Mayor of this great city of Granada, and to Excellency Doña Fuensanta Coves, the Counsellor for the Environment of Andalucía, for honouring this meeting with their personal presence and for their hospitality and generosity.

I would like also to express our gratitude for the unique opportunity provided to be able to witness how ancient culture can be preserved, integrated and combined with all of modern progress and what technological advance can offer for the benefit of mankind and its environment. During the negotiations of the Convention and during the last 13 years since its entry into force, Spain has been one of its staunchest supporters. Spain has provided special support to promoting the Convention's activities aimed at preserving and maintaining the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities of relevance to the three objectives of the Convention. In addition to the two meetings of this Working Group, Spain also hosted the First Workshop on Traditional Knowledge and Biological Diversity, in Madrid in 1997. I would like therefore to ask Her Excellency Cristina Narbona Ruiz, the Minister of Environment, to convey to the authorities of the Kingdom of Spain our deep and sincere gratitude.

I also wish to thank the Governments of Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland, as well as the European Commission and the Christensen Fund, which provided financial resources in support of the participation of developing countries and representatives of indigenous and local communities. Without such financial support, this highly significant meeting would have missed the crucial contribution these countries and communities have to offer.

Indeed, six years after its establishment, our working group is coming back to the land of its birth. Any journey into the past is always a unique opportunity to assess what has been done but, most importantly, what remains to be achieved. This applies to our meeting today in this prestigious city of the Alhambra, its Parador de Granada and the Dama de Baza.

Since its first meeting, which was held here in Spain, in Seville, in March 2000, your Working Group has done a remarkable job in raising the profile of indigenous and local communities in the Convention and given them a real and effective voice. It has done so to a level unparalleled in the UN system. The development of the Akwé: Kon Guidelines for the conduct of cultural, environmental and social impact assessments is among your achievements. Let me therefore congratulate all of you for a job well done.

As the Convention is entering a new and exciting phase of enhanced implementation, this meeting in the historic city of Grenada offers a unique opportunity for furthering the implementation of Article 8(j). Your first meeting, in Seville, agreed on a comprehensive work programme, and I sincerely hope that your meeting this week—guided by the spirit of Granada and inspired by the experience of the Guadix community—will be remembered as the birthplace of the enhanced implementation era for the preservation and maintenance of knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities. I would like to solemnly reiterate my commitment as

contained in the message addressed to your community last week, where I stated that “the battle to protect life on Earth is ours and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, will always be your faithful partners in this urgent struggle”.

Mesdames et Messieurs

A quelques encablures de notre lieu de rencontre, à la Huerta de San Vicente, se trouve le lieu de naissance d'un des plus grands poètes de notre temps, Federico Garcia Lorca dont les écrits ont incarné avec beaucoup de beauté et d'amour, l'héroïsme, l'élégance, la noblesse et l'intelligence typiques au peuple de la grande nation espagnole. Il a aussi immortalisé son amour pour Grenade, sa ville natale. Ses écrits sont un hommage éternel à ce peuple d'Andalousie épris d'espace, de liberté et d'amour de la nature. Désespéré par les agressions contre la Nature, n'a-t-il pas écrit que “la terre est le probable paradis perdu”. Faisons donc qu'ensemble et grâce à vos délibérations et nos gestes de tous les jours en tant que citoyens de la planète, notre Terre puisse le plus rapidement possible se réconcilier avec son destin originel et sa vocation première et puisse redevenir ce Paradis qui aurait du être toujours sa marque distinctive. Nous le devons à nous même. Nous le devons à nos enfants. Nous le devons à notre terre commune, la mère de toute vie sur terre, y compris la notre.

Je vous remercie de votre aimable attention et vous souhaite tout le succès possible dans vos travaux.

Thank you