



Twenty-three Former Foreign Ministers Call on World Leaders to Protect Biodiversity

EMBARGOED UNTIL: 18 February 2020 at 00:01 ET

We are a group of former foreign ministers from around the world who met recently to discuss one of the most urgent challenges of our time: the deepening global environmental crisis. It is clear to us from these discussions that climate change, ecosystem degradation, and the excessive exploitation of natural resources are now threatening millions of species with extinction and jeopardizing the health of our planet. Having devoted our careers to fostering international cooperation and stability, we are as gravely concerned about this environmental destruction as we are about any other threat to international security.

The loss and degradation of nature jeopardizes human health, livelihoods, safety and prosperity. It disproportionately harms our poorest communities while undermining our ability to meet a broad range of targets set by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. We must rise above politics and ideology to unite the global community around the urgent cause of protecting our planet and way of life.

To that end, we strongly support action to establish ambitious targets at the upcoming meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Kunming, China in late 2020. Specifically, we endorse setting a global target of strongly protecting at least 30 percent of the land and 30 percent of the ocean by 2030.

The marine environment deserves special attention, as it covers 70 percent of our planet, and even people who live far inland depend on the ocean to produce half of the oxygen we breathe, to serve as the primary source of protein for over three billion people, and to help maintain a livable climate. In addition to protecting 30% of the ocean, we also call on nations of the world to manage the entirety of their ocean territories in a manner that is sustainable, equitable, and integrated across sectors. This combination of protection and sustainable management will ensure the health and productivity of the global ocean on which we all depend.

In order to meet these targets, we also support the finalization of a new international legally binding treaty in 2020 for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in the high seas currently being negotiated under the UN Convention on Law of the Sea. This treaty needs to establish mechanisms that will allow us to protect at least 30 percent and assess and sustainably manage the rest of the high seas —the nearly two-thirds of the global ocean that lies beyond the legal jurisdiction of any one country.

The world has a moral imperative to collaborate on strong actions to mitigate and adapt to the current climate change and biodiversity crisis. Ambitious targets for conservation of land and ocean ecosystems are vital components of the solution. We are proud to join with a broad coalition – including youth, the business community, and representatives from the developing world – in calling on world leaders to support an “at least 30 percent” conservation target through the Convention on Biological Diversity. Humanity sits on the precipice of irreversible loss of biodiversity and a climate crisis that imperils the future for our grandchildren and generations to come. The world must act boldly, and it must act now.

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