

**4th Plenary Session of the IPBES,
Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), 22 February 2016**

**Opening Remarks by Mr Ibrahim Thiaw,
Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Environment
Programme**

An Unavoidable Crossroads

Prime Minister, Professor Zakri, Braulio Dias, ladies and gentlemen, Dear IPBES community

Welcome back to Malaysia. Some of you may remember this. After having been identified in Paris, the new seeds started being selected here in Putrajaya, in November 2008. After a long journey across continents, the crops were planted in Bonn. Little and invisible pollinators must have flown from Busan to Panama, via Nairobi, before landing in Antalya Turkey. Back to Malaysia, for a first harvest.

Mr Prime Minister, Malaysia should feel proud of this first international harvest. It is a great one. Achieved under the overall leadership of a great global leader, a national of your country.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As I speak here today, also on behalf of the four UN agencies supporting the IPBES, namely FAO, UNDP, UNESCO and UNEP, the world is creeping closer to a population of **9 billion** people with an unprecedented level demand for resources - including **70%** more food than we produce today.

In itself, that's not a problem – as long as we don't think it's business as usual for the biodiversity and the ecosystems that must support it all.

And as long as we recognize that humanity is edging that little bit closer to an unavoidable crossroads where some hard decisions must be taken to address the health and wellbeing of us all:

- Of the **60 million** people fleeing violence and disaster, including the victims of conflicts triggered or funded by natural resources.
- Of the **800 million** going hungry, including those already hit by the degeneration of **40%** of farmland.
- And of the **many, many more** on the front line of human encroachment into new habitats, including the **2 million** a year who die from zoonotic¹ - such as the **Hendra and Nipah** virus diseases to reach people via bats and pigs here in Asia. HIV Aids, Ebola, Water born diseases, Zika virus and numerous influenza viruses such as H1N1.

By destroying or fragmenting habitats, wild species are more likely to come closer to humans, notably the poorest communities that have little immunities and nearly no health facilities. Our best insurance against repetitive outbreaks of viruses, as a global community, is to maintain our ecosystems healthy.

This isn't about being the voice of doom - I just want to make the point that:

- While **poor** management of natural resources can have the kind of devastating impact that I just outlined
- **Responsible** biodiversity and ecosystem management can be an **incredible** force for good, providing:
 - A catalyst for co-operation and peace building.

¹ http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/15/sunday-review/the-ecology-of-disease.html?smid=fb-share&_r=0

- A sustainable source of food, water and economic growth.
- And the foundation on which to build a healthy future, with healthy people and a healthy planet.

The Wealth of our Nations can not be achieved at the expense of the Health of our Ecosystems and our Ecosphere.

An economic growth premised on inequalities and on the depletion of natural resources, undermines the wellbeing of future generations, it leads to social disorder and to disunity.

[IPBES Achievements]

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It has taken time and investment, but thanks to support from **124** governments, over **1,000** experts, **10** technical units, UN agencies and other stakeholders around the world, IPBES is now an effective mechanism to help deliver the global agenda.

- Through the highest standards of transparent, scientific assessment - notably with the pollination and scenario assessments being considered this week.
- And through existing partnerships with the **CBD, UNDP, FAO, UNESCO** and others that provide capacity development and stakeholder engagement, as well as technical, policy and communications support.

This approach really does mean that the IPBES can ensure that its work will benefit all aspects of the 2030 Agenda.

[POLLINATION]

Let me give you an example.

The pollination assessment shows that more than three quarters of our leading global food crops - including coffee, cacao, apples and almonds - rely on animal pollination for their production, with an annual market value of more than **\$235 billion**.

This clearly raises issues for food security, biodiversity and ecosystem management. But it also raises issues around:

- Health and wellbeing.
- Economic growth and job creation.
- And production, consumption and waste.

[IPBES RELEVENCY]

With the stakes so high, we clearly need to ensure the necessary support for IPBES to build momentum and develop the knowledge base for decision makers working towards both the 2020 Aichi targets and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

I want to stress two key factors in achieving that, which I know will be discussed at this session.

1. **First**, the launch of a global assessment to compliment the ongoing regional work. Coming 10 years after the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, this will ensure we stay on track for our 2020 and 2030 commitments.
2. **And second**, the mobilization of resources for the remaining two years of the first work programme, including the outstanding payments addressed in the recent call for Pledges to the Trust Fund. I know that these are difficult times for fund raising, but this is incredibly important – not only for the work of the IPBES but for the entire 2030 Agenda.

[CONCLUSION]

Ladies and gentlemen,

The theme of next year's High Level Political Forum will be: "*ensuring food security on a safe planet by 2030*". I think this demonstrates how integral these issues are.

That's why this session could not come at a better time for building crucial momentum towards the second session of the **UN Environmental Assembly** which will be held in Nairobi, Kenya, 23 to 27 May. You are all cordially invited to actively participate to the multiple debates from Health and Environment to Financing for Sustainable Development, Oceans, Sustainable Pastoralism, Displacement and the Environment etc. We will

also celebrate with the Convention on Biological Diversity the International Biodiversity Day. Don't miss the Science Policy Forum and many more exciting discussions related to the science policy interface.

Excellencies,

I want to end by thanking some people who have built such strong foundations for IPBES and will be equally important in writing the next chapter.

- I want to thank the many **governments** who provide solid support in many different forms.
- I want to thank the **Multidisciplinary Expert Panel** and **Bureau Members** who ensure credibility and relevancy.
- And, of course, I want to thank **Anne Larigauderie and the entire IPBES secretariat** who have risen above some incredible challenges, despite some very tough operating conditions.

But I want to end with a very personal thank you.

- This will be the last plenary for our departing Chair, **Professor Zakri**, who it has been an honour to work with over the last few years.
- But it will definitely not be the last plenary where we benefit from the commitment, determination or inspiration that he brings to those defending the interests of the world's biodiversity and ecosystems.
- For that, I can't thank him enough.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues – a round of applause or even a standing ovation seems a small reward for such a big contribution, but perhaps you would join me..... thank you.

[lead applause towards Professor and depart lectern]