

**Arctic Council SAO plenary meeting
Rovaniemi, Finland
2nd November 2018**

UN Environment speaking notes for observer thematic session on Biodiversity in the Arctic

“Safeguarding biodiversity is fundamental to our survival and to the well-being of everybody, everywhere.” Those were the words of Cristiana Paşca Palmer, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity at a recent meeting preparing for this month’s Conference of Parties in Cairo.

Her statement is timely given the clear warning in the Arctic Biodiversity Assessment that anthropogenic climate change is the most serious threat to biodiversity -- and increases the pressure from all other threats.

One of UN Environment’s main policy goals is to improve global understanding of the implications of Arctic change for the rest of the planet in order to build resilience. To do this, UN Environment aims to transmit knowledge about global environmental challenges and processes that affect the Arctic to policy- and decision-makers at global and regional levels. This approach supports the integration of Arctic science into the implementation of the global environmental agenda and broader Sustainable Development Goals.

International coordination is key to tackling interrelated biodiversity challenges. And successful international coordination requires a clear picture of what is happening. To support this effort, UN Environment and GRID-Arendal are producing a set of maps and graphics to illustrate the most critical environmental challenges in the Arctic and their global relevance.

These graphics will be released at next year’s Arctic Council Ministerial meeting and at the UN Environment Assembly in Nairobi. Based on knowledge generated through Arctic Council working groups, they are anchored in the fact that the Arctic is a home to four million people – and a homeland for Indigenous Peoples.

The recent Arctic Biodiversity Congress here in Rovaniemi brought together a global community engaged in the conservation of Arctic biodiversity. As Tom Barry said earlier today, the main congress message was the need for action. It illustrated the growing global interest in the region, and with that the importance of the Arctic to engage more in relevant global frameworks and initiatives.

The importance of biodiversity and nature-based solutions in supporting achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals applies as much in the Arctic as it does in the tropics. Many lessons learned from the Arctic can be applied elsewhere, just as lessons from the rest of the world could be useful here in the Arctic.

Besides the global importance of the Arctic, the recent Congress also recognized the importance of local solutions to the challenges faced by Arctic biodiversity. As one Permanent Participant said this week, “when you’ve visited one Arctic community, you’ve visited one Arctic community.” Just as no two communities in the Arctic are the same, species and population dynamics vary widely. Sustainability in the Arctic needs to recognize this diversity.

Leadership will be essential. As we look ahead to the post-2020 global framework for biodiversity, it is essential to ensure a strong Arctic voice is heard in the negotiations. Arctic voices need to be heard in the upcoming UN biodiversity conference in Egypt, and in Beijing in 2020. They need to be heard at next year’s UN Environment Assembly in Nairobi, which will focus on innovative solutions to environmental challenges and sustainable consumption and production. And they need to be heard in the UN General Assembly, the various oceans and blue economy conferences, and in negotiations on a legally-binding instrument on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction.

To ensure the most effective post-2020 biodiversity strategy, Arctic states could take a lead in raising their national ambition *in advance* of Beijing, building on and going beyond existing national plans and commitments. They can bring Arctic priorities to forefront – on wetland conservation, sustainable use, mainstreaming biodiversity considerations into infrastructure development, addressing pollution and the introduction of invasive alien species.

The recent release of the IPCC special report on 1.5 degrees provided stark news that we have 12 years to reduce our global emissions by 50% if we are to avoid the most dangerous impacts of climate change. Nowhere else in the world will be subject to greater temperature increases than here in the Arctic, and so it’s imperative for the future of Arctic biodiversity and peoples that collective and individual action is taken to address climate change and adapt to its already emerging impacts.

Failure to take such action will undermine the progress being made towards the recommendations of the Arctic Biodiversity Assessment, and the ability to achieve biodiversity and wider sustainable development goals here in the Arctic.