

SPEECH

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Hyderabad

PM's remarks at the inauguration of the High Level Segment of the 11th CoP to the Convention on Biological Diversity

I am truly delighted to welcome each one of you to this historic city of Hyderabad. India is truly privileged to host for the first time the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. This is also the first such Conference since the launch of the United Nations Decade of Biodiversity last year.

The 11th Conference of Parties is being held at an important juncture. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro, when the world came together to adopt many far-reaching documents, including two legally binding Conventions.

In recent years, it has become increasingly more difficult to find common ground on environmental issues. This is, indeed, unfortunate given that there is today a much higher global awareness of environmental risks and concerns. It is this consciousness that should provoke us to greater action even as we cope with the pressures of the current global economic downturn.

I am, however, glad that negotiations regarding biodiversity have achieved remarkable success. India has recently ratified the Nagoya Protocol and formalised our commitment to it. I would urge all the Parties to do likewise because concerted global action is imperative and cannot brook any further delay. Despite global efforts, the 2010 biodiversity target that we had set for ourselves under the Convention on Biological Diversity was not fully met. This situation needs to change. The critical issue really is how to mobilise the necessary financial, technical and human resources, particularly the incubation, sharing and transfer of technology.

In our country, protecting and promoting biodiversity has always been an integral part of our ethos and our civilization. This can be seen in the thousands of sacred groves that are found all over the country. Our traditional systems of agriculture and medicine depend on plant and animal biodiversity. Conserving the wild ancestors and relatives of the cultivars we use today is of paramount importance to us.

In recent years there has been concern that this public knowledge may become restricted in its use because of the application of the modern intellectual property system. India has tried a unique approach to protection of traditional knowledge by establishing a Traditional Knowledge Digital Library. This database has 34 million pages of information in five international languages in formats easily accessible by patent examiners. This Library promotes the objectives of the Nagoya Protocol on the issue of protection of codified traditional knowledge systems such as the celebrated Ayurveda.

We decided to build this knowledge database because of the patent on the use of neem extract in Europe and another on the use of turmeric as a healing agent. Since then, because of this database, over 1000 cases of biopiracy have been identified and over 105 claims withdrawn or cancelled by patent offices.

We believe that the treasure trove of traditional knowledge should be used for the benefit of all humankind rather than for private profit. We will continue to work to strengthen our institutions to record this knowledge, to value its science and to provide benefits to its custodians. Multilateral agencies like the WIPO and some countries have approached us for assistance in setting up such libraries and our government will be happy to provide necessary assistance.

Indian farmers have always believed in the free use of seeds. The Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights' Act of India confers intellectual property to farmers through registration of seed varieties. In our Patent Act we have adopted disclosure requirements on the origin of inventions based on biodiversity. But I believe a lot more needs to be done. We need to build on this experience and build living germplasm laboratories in our fields.

We know that food security is a key challenge for the world, particularly in an increasingly climate vulnerable world. Biodiversity, found in our forests and our fields, could provide us keys to the solutions of the future. So we need to build a movement to conserve traditional varieties of crops.

Our approach to protecting and promoting biodiversity has been guided by the belief that all three objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity, namely, conservation, sustainable use and sharing of benefits from the utilization of genetic resources, should receive adequate and equal focus. This approach is the basis of India's Biological Diversity Act of 2002. The 2008 National Biodiversity Action Plan further identifies specific action points by various government agencies.

Despite the pressure on land in our densely populated country, India has more than 600 Protected Areas, covering approximately 5% of the total geographical area of the country, in a network of National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries, and Conservation Reserves. We have special programmes for some high-profile endangered species like tigers and elephants. In 2010, the country level status assessment for tigers showed an increase in their number to an estimated 1706 from an estimated 1411 in the year 2006.

We recognise that we have to look beyond large animal species and take a more organic approach to conservation. We

have, therefore, initiated work on species recovery programmes on 16 identified endangered species including the snow leopard, hangul and lion. Such country level efforts at preservation should be complemented by enhanced international collaboration to check wildlife crime.

The challenge going forward is to develop new models of inclusive conservation. In India, we have legislated a Forest Rights Act that lends legal sanctity to the rights of forest dwellers, who are often the best friends of the biodiversity that resides in these magnificent forests.

We will have to adopt similarly innovative approaches to deal with the issue of protecting fishermen's livelihoods even as we negotiate a framework on sustainable use of marine biodiversity in the high seas.

There is a realisation that ecosystem services form a much higher percentage of the "GDP of the Poor" than of classical GDP calculations. Biodiversity based livelihood options form the basis of rural survival in many parts of the world. Living at the periphery of subsistence, the poor are the most at risk from biodiversity loss. They should not also be the ones to bear the cost of biodiversity conservation while the benefits are enjoyed by society at large.

India's initiatives acknowledge this correlation between biodiversity conservation and poverty eradication. Our efforts have focused on biodiversity conservation while protecting and promoting livelihoods, particularly in our rural areas. Participatory approaches that encourage and incentivize the involvement of local communities is a key element in our efforts towards conservation.

We have also found that many development schemes can be realigned to provide biodiversity-related benefits. This is vital to protect habitats, including our water bodies, which are beyond our protected areas. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme for example, with an annual outlay of US\$ 6 billion, aims to create legally mandated green jobs for every rural household in our country.

On the occasion of this conference, I am pleased to launch the Hyderabad Pledge and announce that our Government has decided to earmark a sum of US\$ 50 million during India's presidency of the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity to strengthen the institutional mechanism for biodiversity conservation in India. We will use these funds to enhance the technical and human capabilities of our national and state-level mechanisms to attain the Convention on Biological Diversity objectives. We have also earmarked funds to promote similar capacity building in developing countries.

Humankind should understand the importance of preserving biodiversity. The diversity of life forms on Earth is the culmination of millions of years of the productive genius of nature. It is nature's insurance against extreme events that may disturb the delicate balance of this planet. We need to work together and act before a catastrophe is upon us. India stands committed to work with all parties to reach the happy compromise that will secure a future that provides ecological and economic space for each one of us and sustainable growth for all of us. I thank you.

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