

To: Presidents, Conference of the Parties (COP 16) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP29)

To: Parties to the CBD and the UNFCCC

Cc: Executive Secretaries of the CBD and the UNFCCC

Cc: UNFCCC Climate Champion

Cc: UN Environment Management Group

We, a group of climate scientists, ecologists, social scientists, law and governance scholars, environmental management professionals and others, are writing to ask you to urgently take action to bridge the implementation gaps between the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and the Paris Agreement. We believe this could be done effectively by setting up a joint work programme between the CBD and the UNFCCC, and we ask you to consider initiating processes towards the creation of this much-needed joint policy framework.

We are acutely aware of the existential threat that humanity faces from climate change and the loss of biodiversity. As stated in the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)'s Global Assessment Report on biodiversity and ecosystem services, biodiversity is declining globally at unprecedented rates, eroding the very foundations of our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide. At the same time, the overwhelming scientific consensus, recently expressed in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s Sixth Assessment Report, is that nature and humanity are facing a climate emergency, with anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions altering climatic conditions, sea levels and the pH of surface ocean waters. Recent work estimates that we have now crossed at least seven of eight Earth-system boundaries—the safe operating spaces for humanity. Breaching these limits increases the risk of generating large-scale, abrupt or irreversible environmental changes.

As highlighted in the IPBES-IPCC Co-Sponsored Workshop Report on Biodiversity and Climate Change, the climate and nature crises are not happening in isolation—they are deeply connected. Changes in climate are negatively impacting biodiversity, while the loss of biodiversity is amplifying the breakdown of our climate, making us less able to adapt to it. Yet global strategies to halt these dual crises, such as the GBF and the Paris Agreement, are formulated separately within two international conventions. This is a barrier to simultaneously tackling the interweaved crises, as the current lack of coherent and comprehensive joint policy framework creates implementation gaps whereby (i) some problems are inadequately tackled by both plans, and (ii) solutions developed to tackle one crisis can inadvertently make the other worse.

The CBD and UNFCCC are pivotal platforms for guiding global actions to address the environmental breakdown we are facing. But they cannot continue to work separately. Both Conventions have recognized that their agreements are interdependent and have begun collaborating, and we were for example pleased to see recommendation 25.8 by the CBD Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice that suggested considering establishing a joint work programme to operationalize such integration at future COP meetings. However, no similar recommendation has been issued by the UNFCCC Subsidiary Bodies and the work remains dependent on voluntary actions.

High levels of integration between biodiversity and climate change agendas are essential to identify and address the risks associated with various climate and biodiversity solutions, and coordinate policies around the world that benefit climate, nature and people. A platform dedicated to advancing an environmental agenda that equally supports biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation and adaptation is urgently needed. A joint work programme between the CBD and the UNFCCC, organised in a transparent and inclusive way, could:

- oversee the alignment of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans, Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans to achieve shared objectives;
- be a hub for developing and strengthening methods to monitor and review progress on the interdependent objectives of the GBF and the Paris Agreement;
- identify climate actions that are harmful to biodiversity and transform or quarantine/end them to ensure joint objectives of the Conventions are met;
- organize technical expert dialogues, including experts from different disciplines and holders of traditional knowledge;
- form a platform for visibility and recognition of efforts undertaken by countries, local governments, non-state actors, and Indigenous Peoples and local communities, to advance the programme priorities.

Such a joint work programme should be initiated and advanced with attention to processes and outcomes related to social, economic, community, global and intergenerational justice, while honouring the rights and contributions of Indigenous Peoples and local communities around the world. To be effective, it will need to develop a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) plan for addressing the financial, technical and capacity needs associated with the delivery of its work. Its outcomes could, among other things, inform national plans as well as the critical and fast-developing realm of voluntary actions on biodiversity and climate led by a diversity of actors across sectors on biodiversity and climate, by, for example, facilitating harmonization of the CBD and UNFCCC Action Agendas. Additionally, it could provide guidance to global funding entities to help countries meet their objectives under the two Conventions and guide joint future assessments by the IPCC and the IPBES.

Better coordination and collaboration between all three Rio Conventions is ultimately needed to successfully address the climate and nature crises and deliver the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Addressing land degradation is indeed expected to generate benefits to climate and biodiversity action, and vice versa. Despite being the custodian agency of SDG indicator 15.3.1 on Land Degradation Neutrality, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) currently lacks a comprehensive action plan that matches the level of commitments and details found in the Paris Agreement and the GBF. Because of this, implementation gaps between the UNCCD and the priorities established by the CBD and UNFCCC in the GBF and the Paris Agreement are not clear, making it currently more difficult to articulate a vision for a joint, focused, work programme between the CBD, UNFCCC and UNCCD. By setting up a joint CBD/UNFCCC work programme as a time-bounded yet renewable initiative, there is, however, scope for the UNCCD to contribute to it once such an action plan is agreed.

The upcoming CBD and UNFCCC COPs are critical moments for advancing global action to both stabilize our climate and reverse biodiversity loss. We have a small and rapidly closing window to act. Both Conventions have already recognized that their agreements are interdependent and have begun collaborating, but without a concrete policy framework underpinning these efforts, countries and other actors will continue to struggle to move beyond merely voluntary actions to coordinated implementation. We are calling on you to lead in this critical step by formally initiating processes towards the creation of a much-needed joint policy framework.

Yours sincerely,

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