ISLANDS OF THE WORLD V
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DECLARATION ON ISLAND BIODIVERSITY

That the conservation, protection and sustainable use of the unique terrestrial, freshwater and marine biodiversity of small islands, including the traditional knowledge that island peoples have of their biodiversity and its use, is the single most important precondition for ecologically, economically and culturally sustainable development in small-island states and small-island communities. If action is not taken now, internationally, nationally, and, most importantly, at the community or resource owner and user levels, to address this situation, the richness of small island cultures and the current state of relative economic wellbeing and "subsistence affluence" and peacefulness, so often associated with small islands, will be replaced by widespread biological, economic and cultural poverty in the 21st Century!

In this context "biodiversity" includes:

1. **Ecosystem and Habitat Diversity:** All natural and cultural terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems (e.g. forests, grasslands, swamps, caves, mountains, freshwater bodies, agricultural areas, towns, reefs, lagoons, mangroves, open ocean, etc.);

2. **Species and Taxonomic Diversity:** All species and "taxa" (e.g., types, groups, classes, families, etc. above the species level, such as vertebrates, invertebrates, sharks, shellfish, fungi, palms, gymnosperms, grasses, ferns and othe micro-organisms) of wild and domesticated plants, animals and micro-organisms found in these ecosystems;

3. **Genetic Diversity:** All genetic types, breeds, cultivars or varieties of wild and domesticated or cultivated plants and animals found in these ecosystems (e.g., cultivars of staple food crops, tree crops, vegetables, fodder plants, commercial export crops and breeds of pigs, chickens, dogs, fish. etc.), and, **for the purpose of protecting intellectual property rights**, all chemical extracts and genetic material from, and information about biodiversity; and, finally,

4. **Ethnobiological Diversity:** The knowledge, uses, beliefs, resource-use systems and conservation practices and language that a given island society or cultural group has for their ecosystems, species, taxa and genetic diversity.

It is stressed that, this final category or "level" of biodiversity, **ethnobiological diversity**, must be seen as central to the definition of biodiversity itself because people and their knowledge, traditions and spirituality are seen as integral to all terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems.

This "Declaration on Biodiversity" is predicated on the following factors:

1. That most long-term sustainable development on most small islands has been and will continue to be based on the sustainable use of biodiversity.

2. That small islands often have limited ecosystem diversity and that these ecosystems must be conserved due to the ecological services that they provide to island nations and communities.

3. That small islands, particularly isolated high islands, have high percentages of unique or endemic plants and animals that are found nowhere else in the world and that are of global scientific and potential economic interest.

4. That because island biotas (floras and faunas) are often poor or "disharmonic" in that they lack major groups of plants, animals and micro-organisms normally found in larger continental environments, many island plants and animals have, in the absence of competition and co-evolution with continental species and humans, evolved into unique organisms and communities that are extremely fragile, ill-adapted and very susceptible to degradation, displacement and extinction due to natural disasters, human activities and the introduction of alien plants and animals.

5. That because of the limited commercial economic development options open to most small island states and communities, their natural and cultural biodiversity inheritances must be protected as the insurance and "bio-capital" (a living bank account) that can provide for the subsistence and ecological needs of future generations, regardless of the success or failure of past and future commercial development initiatives that have so often failed in the long run in isolated small island states and communities.

6. That small island societies that have lived for centuries and millennia in close contact with their natural and cultural biodiversity have developed a substantial body of traditional ethnobiological knowledge that should be protected and used, along with modern scientific knowledge, as a basis for planning and sustainable development on small islands. This knowledge is largely undocumented and is thus being rapidly lost as the older people in island societies die.

Given these factors the following priority areas of action are seen as critical to the successful conservation, protection and sustainable use of small island biodiversity.

1. That, under the Convention on Biodiversity, all small-island states complete comprehensive national Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (BSAP) that assess the state of knowledge of their biodiversity, identify vulnerable and endangered ecosystems and species, and develop plans and strategies for their protection and sustainable use.
2. That traditional ethnobiological knowledge be documented and that knowledgeable persons be identified, formally recognized and made integral participants in the conservation of biodiversity at the international, national and local levels.
3. That national Alien Species Action Plans (ASAP) to prevent the introduction, eradicate and control the spread of alien plants, animals and micro-organisms in the fragile small-island environment be developed.

4. That a system of critical terrestrial, freshwater and marine habitats, including, in particular, uninhabited islands and small off-shore islands, be identified for some form of protection at the international, national and sub-national levels.
5. That, unique endemic plants and animals, of international scientific importance and potential economic, medicinal and utilitarian importance be identified and protected as part of the unique natural heritage of small islands.
6. That, for small islands and local communities that may have no endemic plants or animals, all endangered plants and animals of ecological, economic and cultural importance receive some form of protected status, as they are the only plants and animals available to these societies.
7. That emphasis be place on the development of community-based conservation areas and action strategies as a basis for more effective biodiversity conservation by landowners and resource users where governments have limited capability to successfully implement biodiversity conservation initiatives.
8. That adequate instruments be put in place to insure the protection of intellectual property rights in relation to bioprospecting and biodiversity research. This would include measures that local communities or governments that are the focus of bioprospecting or research receive appropriate remuneration, credit and/or outputs of research benefit.
9. That appropriate strategies to strengthen formal and non-formal education about island biodiversity and its past and present importance as a foundation for sustainable island development be put in place.
10. That human resource development in areas relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in small island states be made a priority.