

To: The President of the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biodiversity
CC: Members of the CBD COP Bureau
The Executive Secretary to the CBD

Re: Letter of Concern and Recommendations about the Conference of the Parties (CBD COP) and 3rd meeting of the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)

La Paz, 26 May 2021

Your Excellency;

We extend our condolences to all who have lost loved ones during the pandemic. We are aware some countries, including the Peoples' Republic of China, are slowly overcoming the brunt of the pandemic. However, many developing countries are still coping with high levels of infections, and have inequitable access to life-saving vaccines and therapies.

In this context, due to the current travel restrictions, it is highly unlikely conditions will be adequate in all countries that are Party to the CBD by October 2021 to allow for a safe face-to-face meeting. It is even more unlikely that the crucial 3rd OEWG meeting can be held face-to-face in August. In this respect, we learn with great concern that there have been proposals to go ahead with OEWG3 as a virtual meeting, and that even the COP itself might be organized in the form of a hybrid or even entirely virtual meeting. While appreciating that virtual meetings can, in principle, be a useful, environmentally friendly method to exchange views and information, virtual or semi-virtual negotiation meetings on substantive policy issues are very problematic for several fundamental reasons.

This is why the CBD Alliance would like to express its strong concerns and recommendations about the organization of the upcoming 3rd OEWG meeting and 15th CBD COP during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Experience with virtual CBD negotiations so far, including the SBSTTA 24 and SBI 3 and in other UN spaces, has shown many inequities, limitations and challenges:

- Quite a number of delegates and observers have problems with connectivity, and participants from developing countries and rights holders and vulnerable groups such as IPLCs face substantially more problems than others.
- The timings of virtual meetings are highly inconvenient for several Parties, but more burdensome for Asian and Pacific, and Latin America. Also, the timing and length of virtual negotiations pose an extra burden specially for developing country delegates who often have to simultaneously fulfill other work commitments resulting in unbalanced participation with some countries being absent from some crucial discussions.

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- Another important problem is that vital face-to-face exchanges and discussions, including meetings in the corridors or on the margins of negotiations, are completely absent in virtual settings. This represents a major obstacle to regional coordination and risks not reaching consensus on important issues leading to weak decisions that do not commensurate with Parties' obligations and the urgent need for action.

Considering the above challenges, we suggest the following:

- The OEWG 3 and CBD COP15 should be postponed until such time as they can take place face-to-face under safe conditions. There is a lot of work to be done before the GBF is fit for purpose. We urge Parties to the CBD to take the time needed to develop a transformational, equitable, inclusive and ambitious GBF that truly forms a Strategic Plan.
- Postponing these meetings is not equivalent to inaction. Parties to the CBD have unmet obligations including the founding text of the CBD, previous COP decisions and even work in relation to the Aichi Targets. There is sufficient existing policy guidance on how to achieve the objectives of the Convention.

Sincerely yours,

