

# Speech by the President of the French Republic for the opening of COP15

President of the People's Republic of China,  
Secretary-General of the United Nations,  
Heads of State and Government,

I would like to begin by thanking China for organizing this event. The partly-virtual format of this COP session is the outcome of a global public health crisis which reminds us of how closely intertwined our health, economic prosperity and collective security are with the health of nature. I say this here clearly: mankind will only be able to live on this planet as long as it lives with our environment, and not at its expense.

It is up to our generation to turn the tide and recreate virtuous synergies with nature. More precisely, to make nature central once more to our development model, with a focus on the protection and restoration of ecosystems. That is why, despite the crisis that continues to paralyse our world, I wanted 2021 to be a year of action. We have put together an international programme of action, by hosting two major biodiversity events in which China itself has participated.

The One Planet Summit, held in Paris in January, launched a number of tangible initiatives which are already bearing fruit. I would like to mention the PREZODE programme on zoonotic diseases, which now has four participating partner States and some 30 research bodies around the world, the work of which will help us prevent the next pandemics. I also welcome the launch with our partners of the "The Mediterranean: a Model Sea by 2030" action plan, an ambitious multi-stakeholder initiative for the protection of the Mediterranean basin.

Then, in Marseille, a few weeks ago, we hosted representatives of States, civil society, the private sector and academia from around the world for the World Conservation Congress. In the Marseille Manifesto, the IUCN and its members sent a strong signal to boost nature-based solutions. A few days ahead of COP26, it is our duty to take this cue and step up action for biodiversity and for the climate.

As science confirms, the solutions offered by nature will be crucial to achieving carbon neutrality, and protecting biodiversity requires us to limit global warming. Every time we recreate biodiversity, we protect our people from climate change. Mangroves, oceans and forests are unique ecosystems and our leading allies in this battle. They absorb carbon and reduce the damage caused by extreme events when we suffer them. Our survival is unimaginable without them. We therefore need to pursue a two-fold agenda, and identify the path that will enable us to achieve both carbon neutrality and the restoration of damaged ecosystems.

That is the aim of the initiatives promoted by France, such as the Great Green Wall Accelerator. This major African project is a barrier for the Sahel countries against desertification and the extinction of nature, against food insecurity and in protecting rural jobs, in one of the world's most vulnerable regions. Out of the \$18 billion pledged in January, almost half has so far been delivered.

The fight against deforestation is also essential to preserve our planet's lungs. In 2030, France will no longer import products which have caused deforestation in other States. It is about being coherent and responsible. France hopes the European Union will adopt such a commitment at European level, and that most of the great powers will join us on this agenda as soon as possible.

This complementarity between biodiversity and nature also proves the urgency of stepping up the protection of oceans, humanity's common good. France has therefore decided, at the suggestion of the United Nations, to host a One Ocean Summit in early 2022, to help the efforts of all ambitious public and private stakeholders converge and to promote tangible initiatives.

These commitments from France reflect the themes I would like the upcoming strategic Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework adopted at COP15 to include. It needs to include three priorities of our times: firstly, to address the public health crisis, we need to weave a direct link between the health of nature and public health, and therefore promote the One Health approach. Secondly, protected areas are a pillar for biodiversity protection. I therefore want the COP to be an opportunity to agree on a common goal of protecting 30% of land and sea. Lastly, this conservation goal must come with a specific target of restoring 30% of damaged ecosystems.

Providing financial resources will be crucial to achieving these ambitions. All our investments, both public and private, must be aligned with the aims of the Post-2020 Framework, meaning their impact on nature must be either null or positive. In this respect, I welcome the ongoing efforts of central banks, development banks and of the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosure to assess the impact of financial flows on biodiversity.

All sources of funding, including those tied to existing funds like the Global Environment Facility and climate funds, need to be used to protect, sustainably manage and restore biodiversity. I call on other States and multilateral development banks to share the target France has set itself of dedicating 30% of its international climate finance to biodiversity. This inclusion and awareness of biodiversity by all sectors concerned is what will ensure the success of the Post-2020 Framework.

I repeat: we cannot lead healthy lives on a sick planet. I therefore wish China, as President of COP15, success with the adoption of an ambitious global framework, commensurate with what is at stake and with the expectations of our societies. I would like to thank President Xi Jinping for his invitation and his commitment to these issues, and I hope we will all be able to meet for the second part of this COP session in person.

I hope to see you very soon.