

Mr Kimmo Tiilikainen, Minister of the Environment of Finland

Madam Chair, distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

I warmly welcome this opportunity to exchange views with all of you from both the decision-making and grass roots levels and to learn from your experiences. I would also like to thank the organizers for providing a platform for this discussion. We all know that with regard to nature conservation the only way to achieve sustainable results and reach the biodiversity 2010 target is to involve all stakeholders in the work. I would like to highlight here our key experiences in Finland.

One of the key elements in protecting biodiversity is the preparation and implementation of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans. The Finnish Government adopted last year our new 'National Strategy for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity in Finland 2006-2016: Saving Nature for People'. We have just finalized the accompanying Action Plan for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity.

The strategy aims at ensuring ecologically, economically and socially sustainable use and development of Finland's biodiversity and natural resources. We have put great emphasis on achieving a broad ownership of the strategy by drafting it with the representatives of various stakeholder groups in a national biodiversity committee. In order to enhance the involvement in the agreed actions and to promote the integration of biodiversity, we have established a cross-sectoral biodiversity group for the implementation of the strategy and the action plan.

I would like to emphasise that it is our task to actively build cooperation with stakeholders. We should promote and seek a response from our partners to find new and creative ways to protect biodiversity. Our task is easier if we provide tools and frameworks for the involvement of stakeholders.

In this context let me relate the experiences of our success story – the Metso programme – which is aimed at enhancing biodiversity in the mostly privately owned forests in Southern Finland. Voluntary measures have proven to be a workable method when, for example, enhancing the connectivity of an already established network. One of the key lessons learnt from the programme is that when we find ways to encourage private forest owners to protect biodiversity on their own initiative – and, at the same time, provide suitable mechanisms for voluntary actions – we can unleash a huge potential of positive actions.

Before I conclude, I would like to tell you about our experiences in bilateral cooperation on transboundary protected areas. Finland and Russia have a long tradition of cooperation in the field of nature protection. Today, we are very pleased to note that together we have been stronger – we have gradually succeeded in establishing a representative network of nature conservation areas along our common border, which is 1300 kilometres long. This Green Belt of Fennoscandia, as we call it, has been initiated, planned and implemented together. In addition to being a bilateral exercise, we hope that this will contribute to the cooperation between the EU and Russia on biodiversity.