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Objective of this release	To highlight the work being done around biodiversity by Team Europe in South Africa (to tie-in with International Biodiversity Day)
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Biodiversity is critical to South Africa’s post-Covid-19 economic recovery

Protecting South Africa’s rich, biodiverse ecosystems and investing in pro-nature solutions will be critical to helping the growth and recovery of South Africa’s economy post-Covid-19, says the Delegation of the European Union to South Africa.

Team Europe in South Africa is holding a virtual event with ambassadors, South African local representatives, scientists, youth, civil society and business leaders on Friday 21 May, ahead of the International Day for Biological Diversity on 22 May. The event (called “International Biodiversity Day: South Africa and Team Europe are part of the solution”) will highlight rural, ecotourism and pro-nature business solutions to deal with the biodiversity crisis, while boosting the economy and providing much-needed jobs.

South Africa is home to around 10% of the world’s plant species, 7% of its reptile, bird and mammal species, and around 15% of its marine species, according to the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#). The resources South Africans depend on for food security and health depend on the survival of these natural resources and intricate ecosystems.

The focus on biodiversity comes amid growing global concern about the rate at which species are becoming extinct, all over the world. Scientists say that extinction rates around the world are now 100 to 1 000 times higher than in pre-human times, warning that we’re currently undergoing the largest extinction event since the dinosaurs disappeared.

Some 42% of terrestrial animal and plant species with known trends have declined in population size over the past decade. Tropical forests are being destroyed at fast rates, with an area the size of Greece lost every year. And it’s predicted that if humans continue dumping plastic at current rates, by 2050 the world’s oceans will contain more plastic than fish.

Losing nature has immediate costs for businesses in terms of operational risks, continuity of supply chains, liability risks and risks to reputation, market share and finance. We are often not aware that key industries that rely on nature for a great share of their value: chemicals and materials; aviation, travel and tourism; real estate; mining and metals; supply chain and

transport; retail, consumer goods and lifestyle! On the upside, natural capital investment offer high economic multipliers and positive climate impact.

The EU itself has embarked on a European Green Deal, which includes the EU biodiversity strategy aims to see a third of the land in Europe, and a significant portion of the continent's waterways, turned into protected spaces over the next 30 years; it also significantly promote international collaboration.

South Africa is not only ranking amongst the world's top biodiversity-rich countries, the political and economic weight of South Africa in the United Nations, African Union or G20 context means it is a key player in global efforts to protect ecosystems under threat.

Team Europe in South Africa together with Switzerland Embassy to South Africa believe South African businesses that are moving toward cleaner, greener solutions will give the country the economic boost it needs.

The EU Ambassador to South Africa, Dr Riina Kionka, says protecting the country's natural resources and investing in more sustainable and pro-nature solutions is a no-regret as it drives the direct and indirect local jobs that bring life back to local communities and that are direly needed to jump-start economies'

She adds: "Beyond COVID, we have so much to win from including the concern for biodiversity into policy decisions at all levels, from farming and agriculture to national plans for recovery, energy and transport so as to 'bend the curve' of biodiversity loss. It will make our economies stronger and more resilient."

She concludes: "That is why the EU and almost all its Member States have signed the Leaders Pledge for Nature, which was launched during last year's UN General Assembly, and by doing so committed to reversing biodiversity loss by 2030. Solutions are available, but they have to be implemented at scale. We want to know more of pledges to be part of the solutions from youth, cities, business from South Africa"

<https://www.leaderspledgefornature.org/> and People for our planet aggregator]

ICLEI Deputy Secretary General. "Biodiversity underpins our very existence and livelihoods, and is integral to the effective functioning and well-being of urban communities. We need to make peace with nature and set a new nature-positive development path, in order to secure a sustainable and healthy future for all," says Kobie Brand, Deputy Secretary General of ICLEI and Global Director of ICLEI's Cities Biodiversity Center. "Cities and regions are an essential part of the solution, working together with all levels of government and other actors, to protect biodiversity, restore ecosystems and reconnect people with nature. Our CitiesWithNature global partnership initiative provides a platform for cities and other subnational governments, their communities and experts, to connect, share and learn from each other in mainstreaming nature into our cities and building resilience."

In an effort to be part of the solution, and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the severe loss of income for many protected areas and biodiversity projects, a special Call for Proposals to address

conservation emergencies caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has been opened. The European Union (EU) and the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) have made funds available through the IUCN Save Our Species African Wildlife Initiative, managed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). As part of the IUCN Save Our Species African Wildlife Initiative, a total funding envelope of EUR 1.5M is made available for Rapid Action Grants to support projects responding to threats linked to the COVID-19 crisis and alleviate its impacts on the conservation of terrestrial or freshwater species in South Africa. Funding of up to EUR 100,000 is available, with a maximum duration of 12 months. As of today, three projects have already been funded, for a total value of 258'170 EUR, with more grants to be awarded in the coming weeks.

The grantees are implementing a range of activities, including supporting and enhancing the work of Anti-Poaching Units to conduct their routine security work, promoting human-wildlife coexistence, improving neighbouring communities' livelihoods and improving conservation of Blue Swallows and their threatened grassland habitats. The WILDTRUST, Wildlife ACT, and BirdLife South Africa are implementing these activities in and around Somkhanda Black Rhino Game Reserve in KwaZulu Natal, Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, and Endangered Midlands Mistbelt grassland areas of KwaZulu-Natal and the Mphumalanga grasslands

"Many of the threats facing biodiversity and protected areas have been exacerbated following the COVID-19 pandemic. But we have also seen greater appreciation of nature and the importance of conservation. Working together with various stakeholders including local communities IUCN, is confident that we will develop more resilient ecosystems for the benefit of nature and people," says Luther Anukur, IUCN Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa.

The virtual event is open to the public. Register [here](#) to attend.