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BIDEN Introduces Legislation Calling for U.S. Leadership to Protect Global Biodiversity

Washington, DC – Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, **Joseph R. Biden, Jr. (D-DE)** introduced a resolution today calling for the United States to assume a leadership role in international efforts to protect biological diversity around the world. Presently, one out of every ten species of plants and animals on Earth faces extinction, a number that could reach two-thirds by the end of this century. The growing threat of extinction is the result of several factors, including climate change, mismanagement of natural resources in developing nations and natural phenomena. Sen. Biden's legislation calls for the U.S. to lead an internationally-coordinated effort to identify and protect critically endangered regions around the world.

“With one out of every ten species facing extinction, with habitats declining, and with developing countries searching to build a better economic future while protecting their natural environments, now is the time for renewed efforts to protect our living world,” **said Senator Biden.** “The ten colleagues with whom I worked on this resolution understand that protecting our global biodiversity is actually in our own national interest. Sustainable agricultural practices promise sustainable economies in the developing world. A stable climate will reduce the threat of water shortages, shifting growing seasons, population movements, and resource wars. Protecting habitats not only protects the rich diversity of life on earth – protecting habitats will preserve some of the most basic building blocks of our economies and societies.

“Moreover, we have a moral obligation to protect biodiversity. Ensuring that we can feed and clothe and shelter millions more people while preserving the elaborate tapestry of creation will allow our children and grandchildren to inherit the rich planet that we were bequeathed,” **added Senator Biden.**

Sen. Biden's full congressional record statement is below and a copy of the bill is attached.

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Mr. BIDEN. “Mr. President, the evidence is clear. We stand at the brink of major losses among the living species on our planet. By the end of this century, as many as two out of every three plant and animal species could be in danger of extinction. This disturbing trend has many causes, but several are clear and manmade – they are our responsibility and they are within our control.

“Our industrial emissions are changing our world’s climate and, in so doing, drastically altering habitats – habitats already threatened by deforestation and other land-use changes. Unsustainable fishing and the spread of invasive species due to enhanced global commerce pose similar manmade challenges.

“That is why, Mr. President, I am introducing, along with Senators Snowe, Boxer, Lugar, Kerry, Specter, Menendez, Brownback, Bayh, Stabenow, and Feingold, a resolution expressing the sense of the Senate that the United States should take a leadership role in protecting international biodiversity. With one out of every ten species facing extinction, with habitats declining, and with developing countries searching to build a better economic future while protecting their natural environments, now is the time for renewed efforts to protect our living world.

“This morning, my colleagues and I hosted a briefing by Dr. Edward O. Wilson, renowned University Research Professor Emeritus at Harvard and author of two Pulitzer Prize-winning books, and Dr. Eric Chivian, who shared the Nobel Peace Prize and is Founder and Director of the Center for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard Medical School. These two eminent scientists made the case that biodiversity is not just a moral, ecological, and economic issue, but also one of major importance to human health.

“We often find, Mr. President, that the areas most in danger are in developing nations, which have the least ability to protect them. Developing nations face very real economic and human challenges. Many are struggling to provide enough food for their people, especially given the recent rise in food prices. They now face the choice between feeding their people and preserving their environment. We know how that will turn out. We must give them another choice.

“To do that, the United States and other wealthy nations must help. The ten colleagues with whom I worked on this resolution understand that protecting our global biodiversity is actually in our own national interest. Sustainable agricultural practices promise sustainable economies in the developing world. A stable climate will reduce the threat of water shortages, shifting growing seasons, population movements, and resource wars. Protecting habitats not only protects the rich diversity of life on earth – protecting habitats will preserve some of the most basic building blocks of our economies and societies.

“Not least, Mr. President, as Dr. Wilson and Dr. Chivian so persuasively argue, the preservation of biodiversity is an investment in human health. More than a quarter of the world’s medicinal drugs possess active ingredients from wild species, and more than half of the most prescribed medicines in the United States are based on natural compounds. If we hope to advance medicine, to ease pain and suffering and to extend lifespans, the bounty of nature offers an indispensable guide and resource.

“Finally, Mr. President, we have a moral obligation to protect biodiversity. Ensuring that we can feed and clothe and shelter millions more people while preserving the elaborate

tapestry of creation will allow our children and grandchildren to inherit the rich planet that we were bequeathed. Species extinctions are nothing new. But species extinctions that are avoidable, that are within our power to prevent, extinctions due to our greed, or our ignorance, impose on us a special responsibility. Those are mistakes that can never be undone. We must resolve to do all we can to replace greed with a better calculation of our long-term interests. We must resolve to replace ignorance with knowledge and with wisdom.

“That is why my colleagues and I are offering the resolution, to express the will of the Senate to redouble United States efforts internationally to protect our world in all its complexity, and diversity. I ask unanimous consent that the full text of the resolution be printed in the record. I thank the Chair and I yield the floor.”

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