

ClassACT HR73 Action Group on the Ratification of the Biological Diversity Treaty

15 May 2023

In the early 1990s, members of the United Nations gathered to design an international treaty to conserve biodiversity and mitigate the threat of species extinction. The Convention on Biological Diversity, which was drafted with leadership from the US as the most comprehensive agreement ever written to reduce the global loss of biodiversity, was later agreed to by all participating countries. President Bill Clinton signed this monumental treaty in 1993, but it has never been ratified by the required 2/3rds of the US Senate. The US stands starkly isolated as a non-party, harming our world image and our ability to affect global conservation and sustainability efforts.

Today, with nearly one million species at risk of extinction, all participating countries are moving forward with plans for the implementation of biodiversity conservation measures throughout the world without US involvement. In December of 2022, 1973 classmate **John Kress** attended the UN 15th Conference of the Parties (COP15) on Biological Diversity in Montreal where, with other US "observers," he was able to listen to the proceedings and have informal discussions with attendees from across the globe. He came away from Montreal convinced that the US must ratify the treaty in order to have a seat at the table and a say in the process of developing the new Global Biodiversity Framework, which was the product of COP15. The US has expertise and resources that must be included in the on-going plans for biodiversity conservation.

As a result of our ClassACT Forums, "Half Earth: Conserving Biodiversity from the Deep Sea to Mt. Everest" and "Protecting Half-Earth: Opportunities and Obstacles," calls for action sounded across the Harvard community. John has been joined by five other classmates: **John Adams, Bob Dreher, Henrietta Lodge, Sharon Tisher** and **Deane Wang**, to form a ClassAct HR73 action group to focus on the US ratification of the treaty on Biological Diversity. The goal is to take a variety of actions in the next two years to exert significant influence over the Senate to obtain the necessary 67 votes to ratify the treaty. This result is critical to make sure that the US will participate as a full member at the next COP in 2024, which will hammer out significant steps in the implementation of the treaty with global impact. It is in the interests of the US, its people, and its businesses that the US is there as a voting party.

Acknowledging this ambitious goal and the obstacles to overcome, the undertaking is, nonetheless, a worthy and necessary objective. The planet, the diversity of Nature, and our way of life is in danger. The action group's approach is to emphasize that the moral, humanitarian, and environmental aspects of the treaty are more important than the current political divisions in the US. As a result, besides the traditional national and local environmental organizations and government agencies, our group's educational efforts and advocacy for Treaty ratification will expand to faith-based organizations, hunting and sportsman's groups, foundations and funding partners, pharmaceutical and other corporations, indigenous peoples, environmental justice advocates, and local grassroots efforts. As citizens of the Earth with a stake in maintaining the diversity of species from the ocean's microorganisms to plants and apex predators, all of these groups have reason to benefit from the treaty's ratification by the US. It is hoped that these organizations and others will influence Senators of all political persuasions to bring the treaty to the Senate floor and vote for ratification.

The action group's formation reflects ClassACT HR73's mission to connect classmates, the entire Harvard community, and a wide range of constituents and organizations to identify key problems and mobilize to "Achieve Change Together." To join the effort, please contact Kate Freed (kfreed@classacthr73.org) or classmates John Kress (kressj@si.edu) or Bob Dreher (bobdreher1@gmail.com).