



Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

PRESS RELEASE



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**BIODIVERSITY
AND AGRICULTURE**

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GERMANY HOSTS GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY - PROMOTING A GLOBAL RESPONSE FOR ADDRESSING THE UNPRECEDENTED LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY

Montreal – 8 May 2008. “Renewing agricultural diversity of crops and livestock backed by a functional natural support system is the international community’s best long-term solution to meet the global food challenge,” said Ahmed Djoghla, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity prior to the start of the global conference on biodiversity on 19 May 2008 in Bonn, Germany.

The meeting of 191 countries takes place at a time when the international community is faced with one of the most severe food crisis of modern history. The prices of basic staples—wheat, corn, rice—are at record highs, and global food stocks are at historical lows. Indeed, one of the most important challenges facing mankind is to feed a growing population in an increasingly urbanized world confronted with the combined impacts of climate change and the unprecedented loss of biodiversity.

The renewal of agricultural biological diversity, including ways to address the adverse effects of climate change, is among the main issues for discussion at the two-week conference. “Agriculture is considered a prime example of how human activities profoundly impact the ecological functioning of the planet,” said Dr. Djoghla. “During the past 50 years, humans have altered ecosystems more rapidly and extensively than in any other period in human history. Indeed, more land was converted to cropland during the last fifty years than in the previous two centuries. This is why the issue of biodiversity and agriculture is on the agenda of the Bonn conference and is the theme for this year’s International Day for Biological Diversity, which will be celebrated throughout the world on 22 May.”

Since the dawn of history, humans have used more than 7,000 plant species to satisfy their needs. During the last 100 years, seventy-five per cent of the food-crop varieties we once grew are no longer cultivated. Today, we rely on just three—wheat, rice and maize—for over two thirds of our calories. This increased dependency on limited biological diversity drastically escalates the global risk that it may be impossible to sustain future food supplies for a growing population in a warmer planet. As stated by Mr. Djoghla, “The unfolding food crisis is a symptom of a much more profound problem.”

The Bonn biodiversity meeting will also address the accelerated rate of deforestation. According to Mr. Djoghla, “Every minute, 20 hectares of forests are disappearing. Every year more than 10 million hectares of forests are destroyed. However, 80% of biodiversity is found in forests, especially tropical forests.”

The conference takes place two years before the deadline for achieving the 2010 biodiversity target, adopted in 2002 by 110 Heads of State and Government, of significantly reducing the rate of biodiversity loss at the global and national level by 2010, as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on Earth. The participants will also agree on a road map to finalize, by 2010, the negotiation of an agreed set of rules on access to genetic resources and sharing of the benefits derived from their utilization. The “International regime on access to genetic resources and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits



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arising out of their utilization” will be a major tool for ensuring the successful implementation of the Millennium development Goals and eradicating poverty.

Achim Steiner, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), said: “Our planet has witnessed five mass extinctions over the millions of years of life on Earth. A sixth is currently under way, driven for the first time in history by mainly human impacts. Over the coming decades the pace of loss of species could rise to 1,000 to 10,000 times the background rate. This is nothing less than asset-stripping of the globe’s natural and nature-based capital—from forests and coral reefs to river systems and soils.”

“There are many shining examples of intelligent management of the planet’s nature-based resources. The time has come to accelerate and replicate them across the globe backed by sufficient finance, creative market mechanisms, the strengthening of efforts to achieve the three objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity, including access to genetic resources and benefit-sharing, and a new sense of urgency. In Bali, we had a breakthrough on climate change. In Bonn, we need nothing less than a breakthrough on biodiversity,” he said.

Brunei Darussalam, one of the richest countries in terms of biodiversity, will be welcomed by the expected 6,000 participants to the Bonn biodiversity meeting as the 191st Party to the Convention.

The meeting will also be attended by Heads of State and Government, and an unprecedented number of ministers of the environment are also expected, together with representatives of Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, indigenous and local communities, youth, mayors, parliamentarians, and the scientific, media and business communities. The proceedings of the meeting will be broadcast live over the Web and can be accessed through the CBD website (www.cbd.int).

The Bonn meeting will be concluded by the convening of a Global Ministerial Forum with the expected participation of more than 100 ministers. This meeting will be opened by German Federal Chancellor Ms Angela Merkel with the participation of other Heads of State and Government. At this session, the German Government is expected to announce a specific commitment for preserving biological diversity and ecological systems titled the “Life Web Initiative.” This will be followed by an invitation to all Governments for making similar concrete commitments. “Germany has established a Nature Alliance, and we hope that the Bonn meeting will be remembered as the cradle of a universal global alliance for protecting life on Earth,” said Mr. Djoghla.

“The purpose of this initiative is to match voluntary commitments for the designation of new protected areas and improved management of existing areas with commitments for dedicated financing of these areas,” said Mr. Sigmar Gabriel, Germany’s Federal Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety.

He added that: “Progress in establishing a global network of protected areas is, in our view, one of the key topics of the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. The network of protected areas is one of the central instruments for halting the dramatic global loss of species and habitats and for providing a solid basis for the conservation of natural resources. Intact habitats such as forests, wetlands and coral reefs are also important sinks for climate gases and play a fundamental role in the natural regulation of the climate. Conserving habitats is active climate protection.”

The Convention describes protected areas as a geographically defined area managed primarily to achieve specific conservation objectives, and considers them an important stock of natural and cultural capital, yielding flows of economically valuable goods and services that benefit human populations.

In the words of Marina Silva, President of the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, held in Curitiba, Brazil, in 2006 and Minister of the Environment of Brazil: “Two years ago in Curitiba, a new phase of enhanced implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity was born. The Bonn biodiversity meeting should be a milestone in a new phase of enhanced commitment to the implementation of the three objectives of the Convention, including tangible progress in the negotiations

towards the Bonn compact for the adoption of an international regime on access to genetic resources and benefit-sharing”

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

Opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the Convention on Biological Diversity is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the equitable sharing of the benefits from utilization of genetic resources. With 191 Parties, the CBD has near-universal participation among countries committed to preserving life on Earth. The CBD seeks to address all threats to biodiversity and ecosystem services, including threats from climate change, through scientific assessments, the development of tools, incentives and processes, the transfer of technologies and good practices and the full and active involvement of relevant stakeholders including indigenous and local communities, youth, NGOs, women and the business community. The headquarters of the Secretariat of the Convention are located in Montreal,. For additional information, please contact Marie Aminata Khan at +1 514 287 8701; email: marie.khan@cbd.int

Information for journalists

To access the live webcast, please visit the home page of the CBD website, www.cbd.int, and follow the links indicated.