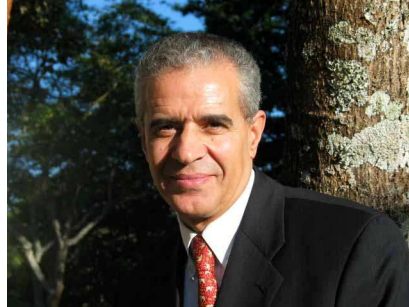




**MESSAGE OF DR. AHMED DJOHLAF,  
THE NEW EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY,  
TO THE INDIGENOUS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES OF THE WORLD**



Most of you live in areas of mega-diversity and your species-diverse environments are deeply embedded in your productive and spiritual relationship with our Mother Earth. The international community will remain forever indebted to you, as the very origins of the international biodiversity agenda are found in the practices of your ancient cultures. Indeed of the estimated 6,000 cultures in the world, between 4,000 and 5,000 are indigenous. From your holistic perspective, nature is seen as a sacred whole and therefore human beings are united with the Earth, not separate from it.. Because spirituality is the highest form of consciousness, you have contributed to raise the international community's global conscience on the need to put the biodiversity issues high on the agenda. As a result, Chapter 26 of Agenda 21, adopted at the Rio Summit in 1992, called for the strengthening of your role in promoting sustainable development including its biodiversity component.

The Convention on Biological Diversity is one of the major international movements to recognize your role in conserving and ensuring the sustainable use of biodiversity including through traditional knowledge. This recognition is enshrined in the preamble of the convention as well as its Article 8(j). This unique legal instrument stresses the importance of customary practice in biodiversity conservation and calls for its protection and for equitable benefit sharing from the use and application of traditional technologies. To this end, at its first meeting held in Nassau in 1994, the Conference of the Parties decided to establish within the Secretariat our focal point on issues of concern to you. At its fourth meeting in 1998, it decided to establish your Ad hoc Open Ended inter-sessional working group on Article 8(j), Traditional knowledge, innovations and practices..

As the Convention has begun an exciting phase of enhanced implementation, you, as one of its major stakeholders, have a major role to play. The battle to protect life on Earth is also yours and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, that I have been honoured to head in the years to come, will always be on your side, as your faithful partner. I look forward to working with you and your representative organizations in the years to come to ensure the full implementation of the objectives of the Convention for the benefit of your communities, the environment and its people. To this end, I look forward to meeting the representatives of your organizations very soon, at the Working Group on Article 8(j) and the Working Group on Access and Benefit Sharing, which will be held in Granada, Spain from the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January to the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February this year and then again at the Eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to be held in Curitiba, Brazil from 21 to 31 March 2006.

Both of these meetings will consider broad ranging issues that are relevant to your role in the preservation of life on Earth. Your participation in these meetings and in the process of the Convention is central. We cannot complete our work without your involvement.

I look forward to meeting you, to receiving your input and building our partnership as we work to ensure the future of our planet through the full and effective implementation of the Convention and its goals.

Montreal, 6 January 2006