

Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity



CBD

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Biodiversity and Climate Change

STATEMENT

by

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to the

Symposium on Climate Change and the European Water Dimension

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It is a great pleasure to be able to address this important meeting.

Water is the basis of all life and our most valuable natural resource. Mr. Mostafa Tolba, the former Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, speaking over a decade ago, said, “We used to think that energy and water would be the critical issues for the next century. Now we think water will be the critical issue”. He was right—but the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment confirmed that global warming is now the major driver of environmental change, reframing the critical nature of water issues. I therefore applaud your initiative to move the water and climate change agenda forward. Your initiative is much welcomed as it is taking place while the global biodiversity community is actively engaged in preparing the celebration of the International Day for Biological Diversity on 22 May, under the theme biodiversity and climate change.

Biodiversity considerations are central to this subject, for example:

- Our second Global Biodiversity Outlook confirms that the rate of biodiversity loss from inland waters is already the fastest of all biomes. Alarming, unless we think and plan wisely, this trend will be accelerated by climate change and, more importantly, by inappropriate responses to it;
- Biodiversity has a critical role to play in mitigating and adapting to climate change. For example: healthy and intact river systems provide a considerable service through flood mitigation; healthy wetlands play a critical role in sustaining water supplies for multiple human uses, nutrient recycling and absorbing pollution. Biodiversity is also an insurance policy in these times of uncertainty; and
- Wetlands are an underestimated source of, and potential sink for, greenhouse gases. European wetlands provide a clear indication of these linkages. The peat-bogs of western Siberia, for example, contain some 70 billion tonnes of methane, a quarter of all the methane stored on the land surface worldwide.

We have choices. Historically, water management practice has regarded nature as the adversary and engineered itself against it—often with catastrophic results. We must begin to plan with nature on our side. Biodiversity is not just the victim of our mismanagement—it is our ally in managing better.

At the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, held in Curitiba, Brazil, from 20 to 31 March 2006, the Parties established a process to

improve the delivery of our message on water to the many stakeholders to get them fully involved in the implementation of the Convention, and to report on progress towards common goals. Meeting documents made particular mention of the European Water Framework Directive as setting a good example on the way forward. Regarding climate change, the Conference of the Parties provided guidance to promote synergy among activities for biodiversity conservation, mitigating or adapting to climate change and combating land degradation.

The recently produced assessment of peatlands, biodiversity and climate change will be considered at the upcoming twelfth meeting of the Convention's Subsidiary Body on Scientific Technical and Technological Advice, to be held in Paris from 2 to 6 July 2007. The prominence of peatlands in Europe, including in Germany, where they account for almost 5% of the total land area, and their potential as carbon sinks worldwide, will help raise the profile of climate change, water and biodiversity as a key issue in environmental management in Europe.

This symposium is a major contribution in this regard. I am particularly supportive of the need to bring relevant conclusions and recommendations to the highest political level. This echoes my own efforts. You have identified an important strategic opportunity with the current German Presidency of the European Union. Germany has also been one of the strongest supporters of the Convention on Biological Diversity and will host the ninth meeting of its Conference of the Parties in Bonn from 19 to 30 May 2008.

Such a commitment was demonstrated in 2006 by the adoption of the Biodiversity Agenda of the EU Presidencies, Germany, Portugal and Slovenia, covering the period 1 January 2007 to 30 June 2008. This cooperation between the three countries and the European Commission, known as the "Triple Presidency", will make the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties a European Union event.

Germany has also demonstrated its commitment by convening in December last year the Potsdam International Workshop on the Convention for the preparation of the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. Indeed, the triple German presidencies of the European Union, the G8 and ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties offer a unique opportunity to advance the biodiversity agenda to mobilize the wider alliance for protecting life on Earth and achieving the 2010 biodiversity target.

I applaud Germany's leadership, and I have no doubts that your outcomes will also contribute to the success of the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. The expectations for that meeting are great, as the stakes are high. In Bonn in May 2008, we will only have two years left to achieve the promise of the international community to reduce substantially the loss of biodiversity. Let us work together to ensure that the meeting will be a landmark event in the life of the Convention on life on Earth. To achieve this strategic objective, you can count on the full support of the Secretariat of the Convention. .

I wish you a successful outcome to the symposium.