



CBD

Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

MESSAGE
from
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Biodiversity and Climate Change

World Environment Day
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As climate change is one of the burning issues on the global agenda, it is only fitting that the theme of this year's World Environment Day - Melting ice – a hot topic? coincides with International Polar Year, and is reflective of the impacts of climate change on our planet. In March the World Meteorological Organization celebrated its day under the theme *Polar Meteorology*, and two weeks ago, the Convention on Biological Diversity celebrated its day under the theme *Biodiversity and Climate change*. This highlights the importance of raising awareness of the negative impacts of climate change on all forms of life, and especially the fragile polar environments.

Climate change is one of the major driving forces behind the unprecedented loss of biodiversity. Before the end of the century, it will be the major driver of biodiversity loss. The relationship between biodiversity and climate change is two-fold – Climate change is an important driver of biodiversity loss, and at the same time, the loss of biodiversity and the deterioration of natural habitats also contribute to climate change.

Species and ecosystems will struggle to keep pace with changes in temperature and rainfall and extinction rates will increase. This is already evident in the Arctic, the environmental “barometer” of our planet, where reduced sea-ice threatens to lead to the disappearance of the iconic polar bear and other unique species.

An important step toward recognizing this interrelationship between climate change and biodiversity was taken in March. The ministers of environment of the G8 and five major newly industrializing countries - Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa - came together in Potsdam specifically to look at these two global challenges. The ministers agreed that more efforts are needed to coherently address climate change and biodiversity together and supported a proposed Potsdam Initiative that will promote better coordination between policies and action addressing the two issues and will include a study of the economic benefits of biological diversity, the costs of its loss and failing to take protective measures versus the costs of effective conservation. The Potsdam Initiative represents a concrete step aimed at addressing linkages between the global challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss. A global alliance is required between the richest countries in terms of biodiversity conservation.

In May 2008, in Bonn, the next ministerial meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity will look at ways and means to accelerate progress in achieving the commitment made by Heads of State at the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable



Development in 2002 to significantly reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. Such a strategic target will not be achieved without decisive leadership and action to address the challenges of climate change.

With regard to the intergovernmental climate change process, this year is critical for moving Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) towards the next phase of multilateral climate change abatement. A strong framework needs to be in place by 2010 to ensure that there is no gap between the end of the Kyoto Protocol's first commitment period in 2012 and the entry into force of a future regime. A comprehensive agenda on the future needs to be agreed at the UN Climate Change Conference to be held in Bali in December this year.

Demonstrating his own leadership on climate change, the United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon has placed the issue at the highest level of his agenda. The G8 Summit in Germany - the host country of the secretariat of the climate change convention and the host of the next international conference on biodiversity - provides a unique opportunity for the eight richest countries in the world to demonstrate their leadership and political will to address, with a sense of urgency, the two major and entwined environmental threats to our planet.

Indigenous and local communities are also greatly affected by the impacts climate change on their ecosystems, however, by implementing innovative projects with little funding, these communities and grassroots groups are key in getting the message out.

By helping to lay the foundation for a global movement of local successes that collectively make a significant contribution to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), they also serve to highlight the increasing global recognition of the strong links between poverty and the environment. Today we will honour these ambassadors for the promotion of sustainable development and the protection of life on Earth through the Equator Prize.

A new global alliance for life on Earth is urgently needed. We can no longer afford to miss any opportunity to turn the objectives of the Rio Earth Summit fifteen years ago into practical action that will safeguard the planet's life support systems. We owe this to ourselves, to our children, to future generations, and to life on Earth.