



Secretariat of the
Convention on Biological Diversity

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Biodiversity and Climate Change

Statement

by

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Executive Secretary of the
Convention on Biological Diversity**

on the occasion of the

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Scientific, Technical and
Technological Advice
of the Convention on Biological Diversity**

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On Robben Island, off the South African coast, the number of African penguins has fallen by over 60% over the last five years. Of a population of 1.2 million not long ago, less than 120,000 penguins are left today. Africa's only native penguin species, and an important symbol of South African identity and national pride, is threatened by the growing scarcity of its preferred source of food. Since 1997, rising water temperatures in the region have caused sardines and anchovies to abandon their habitat and seek a cooler marine environment. Fish reproduction is affected by water temperatures. For example, Atlantic salmon are at risk as a result of the warming of the Basque Country's Nivelle River. At the same time, the significant reduction of Arctic sea-ice is forcing polar bears to fast for increasingly long periods. The average weight of females has shrunk by 20% over the past 25 years, jeopardizing their fertility as a result. And in the United States, no less than 28 states may soon witness the disappearance from their territory of plants that form an integral part of their state identity. The magnolia in Mississippi, the sunflower in Kansas, and the Buckeye in Ohio are just some of the species that may cross the border towards more clement areas in the north.

In countries throughout the world, birds, animals, insects and even plants are on the move, fleeing local climates that are becoming less and less hospitable. But for species like the African penguin, the polar bear or alpine species, migration is not an option. These species will have to adapt where they are, or die. The very real impacts of current atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide have not been seen for the past 650,000 years, and the past eleven years have been the warmest since meteorological were first kept in 1850. According to the report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) launched last February in this very building, between 20 and 30% of species known today may disappear as the result of climate change.

In Europe, last year's autumn was one of the mildest in the past 500 years. This April was one of the warmest ever recorded. The vegetation is eloquent and biologists concur: spring will continue to come increasingly sooner, and autumn, increasingly later. Events that mark spring, such as foliation, flowering and fruit formation are happening earlier and earlier in the year: in France, for example, studies of fruit trees show that flowering now takes place an average of two weeks earlier than it did 25 years ago. In the Loire Valley, William pear-trees blossom 20 days earlier than before, and springtime in Europe has advanced by two and a half days per decade over the past 30 years. These early springs have upset the rhythm of the seasons and upset the synchrony of behaviour patterns that ensure species' survival. The effects on the chain of life and its innumerable interactions, the heritage of millions of years of evolution, have been serious, and may well aggravate the extinction of biological diversity already under way around the world. Fly-catcher populations in areas where early springs have caused caterpillars to hatch sooner have declined by 90%. This disruption of the behaviour of living organisms threatens to exacerbate the loss of pollinators, whose numbers have already dropped by 30% over the past twenty years. And with 35% of the world's crops depending on pollinators, climate change may well bring new issues to the question of food security by affecting the production of rice, wheat, corn, beans and potatoes, staple foods for millions of people, as well as major cereals in Africa. By 2080, it is possible that between 200 and

600 million people will have been added to the growing number of those already suffering from hunger and malnutrition.

Hence, it is now more necessary than ever to mobilize the scientific community at both the local and the international level in order to better understand and hence to better respond to the disturbance of the living environment and the adaptation of animal and plant, marine and terrestrial, species in a increasingly warm world . Ours world has become a where rising temperatures are damaging ecosystems, sometimes irreversibly, not only in terms of how they function but also in terms of their present and future make-up. In this, the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice of the Convention on Biological Diversity has a crucial role to play.

The success of the Scientific Body depends on the establishment of a stronger partnership with the scientific bodies of its two sister Rio conventions. I would like to express my appreciation for the work of the roundtable between members of the Bureau of the Scientific Body and IPCC experts, which took place in Montreal this March with the financial support of Canada.

The irreplaceable role of the Scientific Body of the Convention also depends on the establishment of a stronger partnership with the scientific bodies of the biodiversity-related conventions. Yesterday, here in Paris, a historic meeting was hosted by an equally historic institution. For the first time in the history of international environmental agreements, the chairs of all the scientific bodies of biodiversity-related conventions, the conventions on desertification and climate change and the Chairman of the IPCC held a meeting together with the executive secretaries. I would like to pay special tribute to the French National Museum of Natural History for its contribution in this regard, a contribution that I believe has launched a new tradition of dialogue and cooperation between the scientific bodies of multilateral environmental conventions, as well as a new way of thinking and working together.

I would like to reiterate my gratitude to Mr. Bertrand-Pierre Galey, Director-General of the National Museum of Natural History, for his contribution to the establishment and operationalization of the consortium of scientific institutions comprised of eight prestigious establishments dedicated to the development of the scientific capacity of the Convention's focal points. The training workshop organized at the Museum, a first in the history of the Convention, is a remarkable accomplishment. I would also like to thank the French authorities for their ongoing support for the promotion of multilateral cooperation on environmental issues in a refreshing way that is in step with the demands of the modern world. The presence among us this morning of H.E. Mr. Jean Louis Borloo, Minister of State for the Environment, Territorial Planning and Sustainable Development is testimony to that fact.

The irreplaceable role of the Scientific Body of the Convention also depends on stronger cooperation with the scientific organizations of the United Nations system. The contribution of UNESCO is essential to the realization of the objectives of the Convention. I am delighted at the prospect of reinforced cooperation between UNESCO

and the Secretariat, as reflected in the memorandum of understanding currently being finalized. I would therefore like to pay tribute to Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, whose presence here is of particular significance.

In September 1995, UNESCO hosted the first-ever meeting of the Scientific Body. Like salmon that return to their birthplace to spawn, your scientific body now finds itself at UNESCO headquarters, 12 years after its first meeting, in order to make a new beginning. Through its 121 recommendations, the Scientific Body has fully assumed its role in the development of Convention policies and programmes of work. At a time when the Convention has committed itself to a new phase of enhanced implementation of its three objectives, making adjustments to Convention bodies and their procedures has become an essential task. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Denmark, France, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom for their financial contributions to enable developing countries and countries with economies in transition to have a voice at this meeting.

Thanks to the financial support of the United Nations Environment Programme, and for first time, the past, present and future chairs of the Scientific Body met in Paris last July in order to evaluate past experience with a view to allowing the Scientific Body to assume its rightful role in this period of enhanced implementation. In this connection, I would like to express my appreciation of Mr. Christian Prip, your Chair, and his colleagues at the Bureau for the measures initiated to give this body the means to meet the many great challenges before it. Through the discussions that are held here, your meeting will be an opportunity to demonstrate your determination to meet those challenges, challenges that concern the very future of the Convention. In fulfilling your heavy responsibilities, your Secretariat will always be at your side.

A great activist for the cause of the environment once said that “ecology is also and above all a cultural issue, and respect for the environment requires a great number of changes in behaviour”. This statement also holds true for the Convention, its bodies and its stakeholders. With his “environmental pact”, this great environmentalist succeeded in bringing about a major change in behaviour during the latest French presidential campaign, The “Grenelles de l’environnement” initiative launched by the President of the French Republic, Nicolas Sarkozy, just one day after he was inaugurated, is the most remarkable demonstration of this. I hope that these words, full of wisdom and learning, from Mr. Nicolas Hulot, who I thank for agreeing to be with us this morning, will guide and inspire your discussions today.