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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

**GERMANY'S FIRST NATIONAL FORUM ON
BIODIVERSITY**

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Ladies and Gentlemen:

In the early nineteenth century, the German composer, Felix Mendelssohn, observed that, “the essence of beautiful is unity in variety”. While Mendelssohn was more likely speaking about the music of an orchestra than biological diversity, I feel that this quote captures one of the most fundamental and vital, yet vulnerable, aspect of the natural world; the interconnectedness of its different species and ecosystems makes it unique, special, and irreplaceable. It is for this reason that we are here today— to ensure the protection and sustainable use of the symphony of nature that is found in Germany and in the world today.

Germany has been a leader in environmental initiatives throughout the years. I am impressed to note that Germany has made concrete efforts to increase the number and extent of protected areas within its borders and attain the 2010 target of significantly reducing biodiversity loss. In fact, just 60 kilometres north-east of here is the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, Schorfheide-Chorin. While I have not yet had the opportunity to visit it, I understand it is a beautiful area that protects not only a large variety of ecosystems, such as forests, many lakes, swamps and mires, but also lands of historical, cultural and national importance.

Immediately following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, East and West Germany began collaborating to conserve nature reserves and protected areas established when the country was divided in two. Upon official reunification in 1990, Germany gave itself, and the world, a wonderful gift of five national parks, six biosphere reserves, and three nature parks – which were described as, “*Das Tafelsilber der deutschen Einheit*” (“The crown jewels of a united Germany”), by the then Minister of the Environment, Klaus Töpfer. National parks and protected areas are truly the crown jewels of any country, providing not only natural beauty, but important ecological services, such as water and air purification, as well.

Another unique example of biodiversity conservation in Germany is the long swath of land that once constituted the border between East and West Germany. While impassable and unusable by humans for decades, this land became a refuge for flora and fauna and allowed the natural world to flourish—one that encompasses almost every type of German landscape from coastal lowlands to low mountain regions, including currently endangered habitats. Yet, Germany has not stopped at its national borders. This “Green Belt” has now formed the back-bone of a project to create a trans-European “Green Belt” that will stretch from the Adriatic to the Barents Sea, across 22 countries. This European Green Belt furthers not only the work of the Convention on Biological Diversity, but also Natura 2000 and other European biodiversity initiatives.

Germany has worked at all levels to increase the profile of biological diversity and raise awareness of its importance to our own well-being. I wish to thank the German Government for working to include biodiversity issues as priority in the European Union Triple-Presidency—a step that is key to achieving change. I applaud Germany for leading the Potsdam Initiative that pushed for the inclusion of environmental issues in initiatives to fight global poverty, improve global security and economic development, among others. Additionally, Germany’s invaluable role in bringing biodiversity to the fore at the recent G-8 summit held in Heiligendamm from 6 to 8 June must also be highlighted. This sort of mainstreaming is key to the future health of our planet.

Despite Germany’s leadership and tireless efforts, threats to biodiversity persist and destruction continues—both here and abroad.

The world is facing an unprecedented planetary environmental challenge. Impacts on the natural functions of our planet have never been as destructive as in the last 50 years. It is estimated that over the past hundred years humans have increased species-extinction rates by as

much as 1,000 times the typical background rates over Earth's history – as inferred from the fossil record over Earth's history. All countries are being affected. In fact, just a month ago, in 35 locations around the world, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) launched its fourth Global Environment Outlook, which serves as another important reminder that biodiversity decline and loss of ecosystem services continue to be major global threats to future development and of the urgent need for mankind to double efforts to protect life on Earth. The loss of biological resources has serious consequences to the billions of people around the world who depend on nature for their well-being. We are facing a tremendous challenge; one that is being exacerbated by climate change.

The relationship between biodiversity and climate change runs both ways. While the reports conclude that biodiversity has never been so severely jeopardized as it is today, we also know that a resilient and robust ecosystem, with diverse species, is a key factor in mitigating the effects of climate change. Intact mangroves are an important protection against sea-level rise. A variety of crops and livestock are important resources against changes to the rhythm of the seasons. Maintaining biodiversity will not only make ecosystems resilient in the face of a changing climate, it will help mitigate climate change. Forests and peatlands represent an important storage place for carbon dioxide. Thus, mitigating both biodiversity loss and climate change are one in the same.

What is lost in one country is lost to the world. Thus, each country has a vested interest in mitigating climate change. But more than this, and in the spirit of international cooperation, national Governments should reach out to assist those countries least capable of adapting to the impacts of climate change. The environmental degradation and biodiversity loss that we have caused, and continue to cause, reduces nature's ability to keep us alive and healthy; we limit the ability of poor households, who most directly rely on ecosystem services, to provide for themselves. Those nations that have contributed most to this degradation must also contribute to the solution. Only through synergistic action and social solidarity will we reverse biodiversity loss and mitigate climate change.

Individual efforts by communities, regions, nations, and organizations must be brought together so as to ensure that activities around the world are supporting each other rather than counteracting each other. Neither flora nor fauna adhere to human-drawn borders and thus initiatives at each level must be mutually reinforcing and require dialogue and cooperation. This is the important role played by the Convention on Biological Diversity. Our mandate is to encourage, support, demand, and synergize actions to conserve biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources. To achieve this, the Convention requires that each Contracting Party develop national strategies for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. Without a clear map to direct conservation initiatives, individual projects, while locally successful, may not contribute to the enhancement of nation-wide endeavours, and ultimately are less effective than might be otherwise. Thus, national strategies are vital to ensuring that each project bolster conservation initiatives across the country. More than this, however, a national strategy gives decision makers the mandate to push for laws, educational programmes, and budgets, among other things, that will support the protection of biological diversity. I am pleased to state that Germany is now in compliance with Article 6 of the Convention on Biological Diversity and joins the 156 other Contracting Parties who have submitted national strategies.

Reverence for nature and the concept of sustainable use of biodiversity has long been a part of the German consciousness. Artists and philosophers of the nineteenth-century Romantic era brought the natural beauty to the fore and emphasized the cultural value of nature in man's life. The importance of sustainable use was clearly articulated, in this same period, by Georg

Ludwig Hartig, one of the founders of forestry in Germany. Hartig stated that, “You cannot think of or expect a durable forestry if the felling rate is not sustainable (...) one must manage and use the forest in a way that ensures that future generations can draw as many advantages from it as we do now”. One might call it a precursor to the Brundtland report. This “Vorsorgeprinzip”, or precautionary principle, has permeated German environmental initiatives and thus it is no surprise that the national strategy presented today is a comprehensive and clear plan for reducing biodiversity loss not only here, but beyond German borders as well.

While Germany’s national strategy has been long in coming, the wait has been filled with invaluable public consultations and discussions with experts from such diverse and relevant fields as economics, sociology, ecology, among others, as well as with state and non-state actors. This process is key to the success of a national plan as it ensures the support and ownership of all stakeholders – without which even the most exhaustive plan would fail. I commend Germany for its persistence in this important step.

This past July, the Ad Hoc Working Group on Review of Implementation of the Convention agreed on draft decisions for the consideration of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention at its ninth meeting, this coming May in Bonn. Outlined in this draft are the key elements that Parties have agreed are necessary for national biodiversity strategic action plans. Elements include: securing high-level government support; outlining strategies that are action-driven, practical and prioritized; highlighting the contribution of biodiversity to ecosystem services, poverty alleviation, economic, social, educational and cultural activities; including relevant stakeholders; mainstreaming biodiversity concerns in other national strategies such as achievement of the Millennium Development Goals; just to name a few. Germany has addressed all of these elements and more. In particular, I wish to note Germany’s consideration of the wide-reaching impacts of biodiversity loss especially on poverty, human rights, international development, and the country’s role in improving or worsening these. For example, Germany has set the target that, by 2020, 25 per cent of imported raw materials and natural products should be derived from environmentally sound and socially responsible activities. I wholeheartedly congratulate you on your initiatives.

I cannot overstate the importance of Germany’s focus on inclusion of all relevant stakeholders and its push to mainstream biodiversity into other national strategies. Its strategy’s clear delineation of the role of main groups and each level of government provides a concrete reference for action. Biodiversity is the foundation of our lives. Without it we do not have access to food, shelter, clothing, clean air or water—let alone the many modern conveniences that make our lives more comfortable. Hence, if economic plans, overseas development assistance, or even climate-change initiatives do not take into consideration biodiversity, we are simply spinning our wheels. Growth at the expense of the species that support our lives, or any human life any where in the world, is no growth at all. As Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland stated, “You cannot tackle hunger, disease, and poverty unless you can also provide people with a healthy ecosystem in which their economies can grow.”

Germans should be extremely proud. While your country holds only a small proportion of global biodiversity, you have nonetheless produced a plan that will work to reduce and ultimately reverse environmental degradation here at home and abroad. Your efforts, in conjunction with those of other Parties to the Convention, will make a difference, and together we will achieve the goals of conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of its components.

While there is still more to do, this is a tremendous start. As Johann Wolfgang von Goethe once stated, “What is not started today is never finished tomorrow”. Thus I congratulate the Germany Environment Ministry (BMU) for its achievements to date and am pleased to know

that there is a mechanism for to the strategy to be updated and adapted as new biodiversity-related issues emerge. I am confident that Germany will show continued leadership in all environmental issues. I take this opportunity to reaffirm the full commitment of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity to spare no effort to enhance the collaboration with all stakeholders in the pursuit of our common goals.

At this time, I would like to extend my deep appreciation to the Government of Germany and the many individuals for their outstanding efforts in preparing for the ninth meeting Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on Biological Diversity, to be held in Bonn this coming May. I am deeply impressed by the “National Campaign for Biodiversity”, launched on the occasion of the International Day for Biodiversity, to communicate to a broad public the importance of biodiversity for all our lives—an initiative that would not have been possible without help from individuals from various sectors and levels of government involved in the “Naturallianz” or otherwise. I am certain that this meeting of the Conference of the Parties will be more inclusive and comprehensive than previous ones. I commend Mr. Jochen Flasbach and his team for ensuring that “biodiversity and business” will have a voice at the meeting. Additionally, I am indebted to Ms. Bärbel Dieckmann, Mayor of Bonn, who will host a municipal meeting prior to the high-level segment of the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, so as to consolidate the Global Partnership on Cities and Biological Diversity, initiated in Curitiba last March.

To close, I would like to quote a well-respected German conservationist, Professor Michael Succow, to remind us of our responsibility to ourselves and the rest of the world: “Our task is to consider and plan for a sustainable management of all land and sea so that they carry as much as possible of the world's genetic and ecological riches through the pressures of the next century into what we must all hope will be a stable and sustainable world beyond.”

Congratulations once again, and thank you for your attention.