



# Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

22 May 2007  
International Day for Biological Diversity



Biodiversity and Climate Change

**Statement on behalf of Dr. Ahmed Djoghlaif,  
Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity  
to the  
Sixteenth Session of the African Forestry and Wildlife Commission (AFWC) and the  
Eighteenth Session of the Near East Forestry Commission (NEFC)  
Khartoum, 18 to 21 February 2008**

Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to convey my greetings to the distinguished participants of this joint meeting of the African Forestry and Wildlife Commission and the Near East Forestry Commission. You have tasked yourselves with addressing some of the most crucial issues of our times over the coming days: climate change, water resources, energy, wildfires, protected areas and wildlife. All of these topics are essential for the future of the fabric of life that we all depend upon. I would therefore like to briefly outline some links between your work and that of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and hope to support you in your endeavour to reconcile economic development and the conservation of natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations.

Scientists estimate that forests harbour 50-90% of all terrestrial species. The large margin of uncertainty indicates how many living organisms on our planet are still not scientifically described, including intricate life forms that would be awe-inspiring in their own right but that could, for example, also be the source for new technological inventions and medical solutions in the near future. Yet, forests are disappearing or are being degraded at a fast pace world-wide, and up to 150 species are being lost every day.

While we seem to be headed for an extinction crisis, there is also hope. As you know, the first model of sustainability originated in the forest sector. The first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize, Wangari Maathai, tells us that "It's the little things citizens do. That's what will make the difference. My little thing is planting trees". Indeed, the forest sector in Africa and the Near East will play a central role in shaping a sustainable future for our citizens, including food and water security. The FAO Regional Forestry Commissions are key processes for the much-needed reconciliation between our immediate needs as human beings, and the immediate need to achieve sustainability.

The 190 Parties to the CBD address the challenges related to the loss of forest species and ecosystems through the expanded programme of work on forest biodiversity adopted in 2002,



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which has the triple objective of forest biodiversity conservation, sustainable use, and equitable benefit sharing. The implementation of this programme of work will be reviewed in May 2008 during the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) in Bonn, Germany. In fact, at this very moment, delegates are gathered at FAO Headquarters in Rome for the thirteenth session of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) of the CBD, to prepare the COP decisions. The results of the review indicate that several goals, objectives and actions in the programme of work need to be addressed more fervently at national and regional level, if we are to succeed in achieving the 2010 target, agreed in Johannesburg in 2002, to significantly reduce the loss of biodiversity. Suggested future priority issues for the CBD forest programme of work include the very issues that are on your agenda this week, namely climate change, wildfires, and protected areas. SBSTTA will also discuss a recommendation to address the increasing impacts of bioenergy production on forest biodiversity.

In addition, the CBD programme of work on protected areas is at the heart of the topics you will discuss this week: some of the unparalleled success stories in Africa and other regions, when it comes to securing a sustainable future, are connected to the establishment of large national or transboundary protected areas, mostly forests. However, protected areas in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have evolved considerably from their early predecessors. The World Parks Congress in Durban, in 2003, set the global scene for a paradigm shift for protected areas. Today, we understand that these crown jewels of our natural and cultural heritage are:

- established for the people and managed to meet the needs of local people;
- they are set up for scientific, economic and cultural reasons, as key destinations for tourism with local benefits;
- they are also about restoration and rehabilitation;
- they are planned as part of national, regional and international systems;
- they are developed as ‘networks’, with strictly protected cores, buffered and linked by green corridors, which are often managed forests;
- they are viewed as a community and national asset;
- they are also viewed as an international concern;
- they are managed adaptively, and with political sensitivity, drawing on local knowledge; and
- they are paid for from many sources, including the private sector.

Numerous examples exist where protected areas, if managed properly and supported locally, can generate economic, social and ecological benefits beyond boundaries, for present and future generations. Moreover, protected areas and sustainably managed buffer zone forests are an essential “insurance policy” against climate change, and a key infrastructure for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The recent decisions of the CBD on protected areas reflect this new paradigm, and the CBD Secretariat has supported national governments and regional processes through a series of regional capacity building workshops, including in Southern, Eastern and Central Africa. An informal network of donors, international organizations and non-governmental organizations has been created to support the programme of work, and the CBD Secretariat is joining forces with FAO and with the Secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) to support your regional efforts for the sustainable use and conservation of forest biodiversity. The Global Objectives on Forests aim to reverse the loss of forest cover, and to increase the area of protected

forests, amongst others. These are necessary steps to achieve the 2010 target. The FAO, UNFF and CBD will aim to work jointly in support of these ambitious government commitments and in support of your activities at the national and the regional level.

A win-win scenario for the economic use and the conservation of forests is the concept of Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD), which can be achieved with substantial co-benefits for biodiversity, and for local economic development. The CBD Secretariat is supporting the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility in their efforts to harness these co-benefits.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The quality of life that our forests provide is threatened by many factors, and climate change is uppermost in our minds and on our agendas these days. Droughts and forest fires are projected to increase in semi-arid and arid lands; the effects of air pollution on forests will become more severe as our forests are weakened by weather extremes; and a surge in frequencies and intensities of storms and floods will aggravate problems of erosion and disease. Deforestation contributes up to 20% to annual greenhouse gas emissions. At the same time, the forest sector can play a key role for mitigating the effects of climate change, and for adapting forest ecosystems to its impacts. Ecosystems can better withstand the expected impacts of climate change when they are rich in biodiversity, and the conservation and restoration of carbon-rich ecosystems such as wetlands and forests can be very cost-effective carbon offset measures, while providing considerable co-benefits for sustainable livelihoods and for biodiversity conservation. The Secretariats of the three Rio Conventions have recently drafted a joint information note to all Parties on the important role of forests for achieving the objectives of all three Conventions.

Much has been achieved in the progress towards sustainable forest management, but more efforts are needed to reach the 2010 target. Healthy and intact forest ecosystems are our best insurance against the impacts of climate change, and for a sustained quality of life. I cordially invite you to attend the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Bonn, Germany, from 19 to 30 May 2008, to further strengthen the international recognition for your regional efforts. I also encourage you to interact closely with the National Focal Points of the CBD in your efforts to progress towards sustainable forest management. In this spirit, I wish the meeting every success.

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