



Secretariat of the  
**Convention on Biological Diversity**



INTERNATIONAL  
DAY FOR BIOLOGICAL  
DIVERSITY  
**22 May 2008**  
**BIODIVERSITY  
AND AGRICULTURE**

**STATEMENT BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**

**AHMED DJOGLAF**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE**

**UNITED NATIONS BOOK LAUNCH**

***SUSTAINING LIFE: HOW HUMANS HEALTH DEPENDS  
ON BIODIVERSITY***

**New York, 23 April 2008**

*Please check against delivery*



ONE NATURE • ONE WORLD • OUR FUTURE  
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Distinguished Guests,

A healthy planet depends on healthy ecosystems. Human health also depends on healthy ecosystems. Clean water and air, pollination of crops for food, buffers from floods and storm surges, medicines, cultural values, and raw materials are key to healthy lives. More than this, all of these things that so many of us take for granted, are the result of the intricate interactions of the millions of species that make up Earth's biodiversity and the many ecosystem services that satisfy our needs. And yet, we are destroying it at a faster rate than at any other period in human history. As the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment highlights, the pressures on the planet's natural functions, caused by human activity, have reached such a high level that the ability of ecosystems to satisfy the needs of future generations has been seriously, and perhaps irreversibly, compromised. In undermining biodiversity, we are undermining our own health and well-being. In undermining biodiversity, we are undermining the very foundation of life on Earth. We are undermining our future and that of our children

*Sustaining Life* is a fresh reminder of the urgent need to change our destructive habits. It is not merely an echo of previous arguments, but rather highlights the health-related aspects of biodiversity that have often been overlooked. Indeed, it is more than a book. It is a vibrant testimony with a human face – a testimony of how human health depends on biodiversity and in fact how our life depends on biodiversity. *Sustaining Life* re-establishes the strong link between human health and biodiversity and reminds us that much of modern medicine is drawn directly from the diverse plants and animals that live on this planet and is based on traditional ecological knowledge. Indeed, with so much at risk, it is difficult to comprehend why the world is not moving more quickly or determinedly to reduce biodiversity loss.

We have seen how vital biodiversity is for the health of the planet and how it can help mitigate climate change and reach the Millennium Development Goals. This book now adds the dimension of human health—indeed human rights. As this year coincides with the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, we are all reminded of its article 25 which provides that, “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care.” Destruction of biodiversity erodes one's ability to achieve these basic rights, particularly in developing countries where people rely directly on nature to meet their needs. Thus we have the clear responsibility to conserve biodiversity so as to preserve these inalienable rights: now and for the coming generations.

I commend Harvard Medical School physicians Eric Chivian and Aaron Bernstein for their magnificent contribution in highlighting for the first time the full range of potential threats that loss of biodiversity poses to human health. I commend the 300 experts including more than 100 scientists involved in this initiative, born in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro at the Rio Summit on Environment and Development. Indeed the loss of biodiversity is not only a threat to human health but also a threat to the world economy as well as world peace and international security.

Professor Jeffrey Sachs has just reminded us of the statement made by the former president of the United States of America, John F. Kennedy in period following the “Cuban Missile Crisis” of 1962, “By defining our goal more clearly, by making it seem more manageable and less remote, we can help all people to see it, to draw hope from it, and to move irresistibly towards it.” Today we are faced with a much bigger challenge and we need to define our goals even more clearly for we are striving to protect all life on Earth. It is for this reason

that the United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity -- to define more clearly our goals and help all people to move irresistibly towards them.

It is also for this reason that our master of ceremonies, Mr. Charles McNeill, referred to Professor Sachs as “more than a man; a force of nature.” Professor Sachs is indeed a force of nature in promoting the nexus between biodiversity and the Millennium Development Goals and encouraging the United State of America to become a Party to the Convention on Biological Diversity. Your presence in great numbers here today is also a clear commitment from all of you to become also part of this force of nature for protecting life on earth. Indeed not a single state, not a single citizen of the world can afford to adopt forever an observer attitude when it comes to protecting life on earth. The consequences are a matter of life and death.

By establishing a “Naturallianz” Germany has shown leadership and indicated the way ahead. The United Nations Biodiversity Summit to be held next month in Bonn, in the United Nations City for Sustainable Development, will offer a unique opportunity to establish a universal Global Alliance for protecting life on earth. To this end, *Sustaining Life* will help the expected 5000 participants to better define their goals so as to help the people of the world to move irresistibly towards “One Nature, One World, Our Future”. We owe it to this child in the front seat and to all the children of the world. I invite you all to join us on 21 May 2008 in Bonn for a similar event to launch this testimony for sustaining life.

I thank you for your kind attention.