



Secretariat of the
Convention on Biological Diversity



Statement from

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on the occasion of the

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Authorities – key partners for biodiversity!
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

The growing urban world represents one of the most dramatic changes experienced by humanity in recent history. In 1820, London became the first modern city with a population of more than one million. Sixteenth other cities had joined the list by 1900. Today, the list includes 411 cities. The world's urban population has now reached 3.2 billion people. It has increased nearly fourfold since 1950. By 2030, two thirds of humanity will live in cities. Every year, more than 50 million people, the equivalent of the populations of Spain and Portugal combined are added to the population of the world's cities. If not managed adequately, the growth of the urban population may accelerate the unprecedented loss of biodiversity of our planet. We have all heard the statistic: cities occupy only 2.8 per cent of the Earth's surface, urban dwellers use 75 per cent of the planet's natural resources. Indeed, one of the most important challenges facing mankind is to feed a growing population in an increasingly urbanized world confronted with the combined impacts of climate change and the unprecedented loss of biodiversity. In addition to this, nearly half of the world's major cities are located within 50 kilometres of the coast, and coastal population densities are 2.6 times greater than in inland areas.

The pressures exerted on the planet's natural functions by human activity have reached such a level that the ability of ecosystems to meet the needs of future generations is now seriously, and perhaps irretrievably, compromised. However, the loss of biodiversity is not a human fatality and the unsound urban management is not the unavoidable destiny of cities. Sound urbanization and environmentally well-managed cities can exist.

Protected wetland areas, and other coastal ecosystems such as mangroves and coral reefs, act as storm buffers and help minimize sea-level rise and coastal erosion; protecting densely populated coastal areas. Parks encourage the return of native species and in cases like Singapore, protect the invaluable freshwater source of the city. Trees and parks throughout a city help cool temperatures in the summer and act as wind breakers in the winter. They also absorb noise and give children a safe place to play and enjoy nature.

Thinking that cities are deprived of natural resources is a common misconception. On the contrary, they can be home to a large number of species. For instance, the City of São Paulo (Brazil) has 33 urban parks and a green belt around the city, classified as a Biosphere Reserve, housing 47 endemic species of mammals, as well as 31 species of reptiles and 40 species of amphibians. Furthermore, Nairobi National Park (Kenya) is home to over 400 species of birds. In terms of plant diversity, the City of Cape Town (South Africa) hosts over 2,300 plant species.

Indeed, our host city today, Barcelona, is also a good example of this with its 68 municipal parks ranging from vest-pocket parks to large recreation areas. The parks cover 10 per cent of the city (549.7 hectares or 1358.3 acres); an area that is growing by about 10 ha (25 acres) per year, with a proportion of 18.1 square metres (195 sq ft) of park area per inhabitant. The lessons learned in Barcelona also can be shared with more than 20 cities that Barcelona cooperates with.

Biodiversity is first and foremost a local issue, and solutions must be found with the full involvement of local authorities, from cities to provinces and states, so that strategies and action plans are coordinated all the way from international networks to local action. It is through our daily activities that we impact biodiversity and it is through local actions that the situation can be addressed most efficiently. Humankind depends on healthy ecosystems to survive, and producers and consumers at the local level can take direct action to protect these invaluable resources. A significant part of the activities leading to the achievement of Goal 7 of the Millennium Development Goals (environmental sustainability) will be played out at subnational level, often in urban environments, involving local governments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and civil society as a whole. Therefore, these groups should be included in international biodiversity frameworks, such as those provided by the CBD and IUCN, so as to receive the support and assistance they require as well ensure their challenges, successes, and unique reference points are understood and included.

At the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, held in Bonn, in May 2008, the Parties discussed the role of local authorities in the implementation of the Convention and for the first time ever adopted a decision on cities and biodiversity: decision IX/28. This decision encourages the 191 Parties to the Convention to recognize the role of cities in national strategies and plans, and invites Parties to support and assist cities in implementing the Convention at local level. Indeed, one of the greatest achievements of the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties is the recognition that the implementation of the three objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity requires the full engagement of cities and local authorities.

Indeed as I stated in Bonn, “While cities are today part of the problem of the current unprecedented loss of biodiversity, they are also part of the solution. Indeed, the fight for life on Earth will be won or lost in cities. The hearts of citizen must be won. Local authorities have a major role to play, as global change starts at the local level.” A plan of action on cities and biodiversity will be submitted to the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, to be held in Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture, Japan, in October 2010, which is also the International Year of Biodiversity. Moreover, a Nagoya Summit on Cities and Biodiversity will be convened during the meeting – and based on the advancement I have seen since 2007, I have no doubt that the 2010 meeting will be more extensive in terms of scope and participant than anything we have seen to date.

But as I mentioned, success or failure does not hand solely on the shoulders of decision-makers. In the lead-up to COP-9, I asked one important favour from Governments and cities around the world: help make biological diversity a household name on everyone’s lips. It seems to me that not enough people know what biological diversity entails, let alone its vital importance to our well-being and that of the planet. If the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Cities and Local Authorities initiatives are to be successful and achieve their goals, both short- and long-term, this lack of public awareness must change.

Indeed Lady Mayor Bärbel Dieckmann showed the world how this could be done and in an article prior to COP-9 she noted that: “With its campaign on biological diversity, the city of Bonn is striving for a great goal: by May 2008 as many citizens as possible should have become familiar with the term biological diversity, appreciate its great value and be aware of the contribution that we will all have to make [...] the issue of biological diversity that will be discussed has led to activities on all local levels, whose effects will begin to show before and during the conference and may reach far beyond this event.”

In fact her initiatives have reached far beyond the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. A legacy she should be very proud of. I challenge everyone here today to ensure that by the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties his/her constituents also achieve this basic understanding and recognize their role in biodiversity loss and conservation as well. If this can be achieved, then biodiversity will receive the international attention needed for the final push to reach the 2010 biodiversity target but also the mandate and impetus needed to be effective and successful long after 2010. As Mayor Dieckmann noted “if nobody feels responsible in person, there will be no perceivable change”.

Tommy Koh, an environmentalist from Singapore and the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee of the Rio Summit and later the summit’s Chair – the Summit which saw the birth of the Convention on Biological Diversity -- stated:

“In the final analysis, the goal of sustainable development cannot be achieved by Government, business, experts, international organizations and NGOs alone. We have to win the hearts and minds of the citizens of the world. We have to inculcate in every child a love of nature. We have to influence the daily habits and lifestyles of peoples all over the world. We should aim to persuade every consumer in every country to internalize the ethic of ‘reduce, re-use and recycle’.”

This will occur at the household level, at the school level, at the city level, in short it will relies on local authorities to put the tools in place for parents, teachers, urban planners, and indeed consumers, to draw upon and make changes in their lifestyles, their teaching, their planning, that will ensure the well-being of all life on Earth, including ours and that of our future generations.

Thank you for your attention.