



STATEMENT

by

AHMED DJOGHLAF

**EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE CONVENTION ON
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

on the occasion of the

Eighth Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests

Panel Discussion on “Forests in a Changing Environment”

21 April 2009, UN Headquarters, New York City

Please check against delivery

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today on behalf of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). On the occasion of the International Day for Biodiversity in 2007, celebrated under the theme of Biodiversity and Climate Change, I recalled a saying that “every human being on Earth owes one breath to forests and a second to the oceans.” Yet as climate change advances and biodiversity loss continues at an accelerated pace, we are recognizing that we owe much more than this to forests. This is why I am here today. This is why we are all here today to discuss forests in the context of biodiversity, desertification, and climate change.

Forests are home to two thirds of terrestrial biodiversity. More than 1.6 billion people depend directly on forests and forest products for their livelihoods, materials for shelters, food, medicines, and filtration of water. They can slow down and reverse desertification. And in the present climate debate it is also clear that forests are much more than just stores of carbon. Indeed, in the light of their multiple values and benefits, forests should be seen as our essential “green infrastructure” for the 21st century.

The health and vitality of our forests, and thus the full range of services they can provide, are directly linked to the diversity of species, genes and ecosystems – to biodiversity. And indeed this in turn is linked to the well-being of our planet and all life on it, including ours. Thus, Ladies and Gentlemen, the imperative for enhanced cooperation, not only between the CBD and UNFF, but between all multilateral environmental agreements is clear. For these reasons, among others, I am all the more pleased that you have chosen to strengthen the collaboration of the Forum with other multilateral environmental agreements, and in particular with the Rio conventions, and that you will discuss this enhanced collaboration in the coming two weeks.

It is also for these reasons that the CBD addresses the conservation and sustainable management of forests through the comprehensive programme of work on forest biological diversity, adopted in 2002. Most recently, in May 2008, the CBD Conference of the Parties reaffirmed that the implementation of the programme of work is of high priority, and requested the Executive Secretary of the Convention to explore, with the Director of the UNFF secretariat, opportunities to develop a workplan with targeted joint activities.

Moreover, the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity have also been urged by COP-9 to address, as a matter of priority, major human-induced threats to forest biodiversity – many of which are also highlighted in the Secretary General’s report on forest biodiversity and protected areas. I hope that the Forum will join the CBD in addressing these pressing concerns.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The world faces a great many unprecedented challenges: a global economic crisis, climate change, biodiversity loss, continued poverty, and many other daunting challenges. Addressing each one of these individually is a hopelessly formidable task. Emphasizing the linkages between these challenges and building action plans that target more than one problem is the only path to success. Forests, and sustainable forest management, are at the heart of possible solutions to many of these challenges. The offer of the CBD to strengthen the partnership between our processes, through the secretariats, is acknowledging the great potential for synergies in implementation, and the related opportunities of governments to implement the commitments under both processes more effectively and efficiently – ultimately reducing the burden on governments.

Work on identifying synergies is on-going in many areas.

- The Secretariat of the CBD is currently compiling information on the links between forest biodiversity, climate change, and ecosystem resistance and resilience, and will launch its findings at the World Forestry Congress in October of this year, in Buenos Aires
- the Global Forest Expert Panel on Adaptation of Forests to Climate Change, led by the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO), with the support of the SCBD and other members of the Collaborative Partnership has examined the links between forests and climate change adaptation.
- The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) spearheaded the development of a strategic framework on forests and climate change of the CPF, and I commend the FAO for their leadership. This first-ever joint CPF strategic guidance document has shown the benefit of close collaboration between international organizations, and the valuable lessons that each CPF member can bring to the table.

Further in relation to the debate on the links between forest biodiversity and climate change, I would like to draw your attention to the findings of the Second CBD Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Biodiversity and Climate Change, which addresses forest-based climate-response activities and their links with biodiversity. The full report, including an assessment of the role of forest biodiversity for successful adaptation and mitigation activities, will be presented to UNFCCC COP in Copenhagen later this year. To date, four key conclusions include:

- The conservation of existing forests, especially primary forests, is critical preventing future greenhouse emission and biodiversity loss
- Reducing deforestation and forest degradation can be best achieved through the sustainable management of forests and through forest restoration
- The displacement of economic activities as a results of efforts to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD) can have detrimental consequences for both carbon and biodiversity, and therefore requires careful consideration;

And finally,

- While it is generally recognized that REDD holds potential benefits for forest-dwelling indigenous and local communities, a number of conditions would need to be met for these co-benefits to be achieved. In particular without clear land rights, Indigenous Peoples are unlikely to benefit from REDD. The principle of free, prior and informed consent should be the basis for the participation of indigenous and local communities in the policy-making processes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you are aware, we will celebrate the International Year of Biodiversity in 2010. It will be a time of countless opportunities for raising awareness not only of biodiversity loss, but of its multi-faceted dimensions, including the importance of forest ecosystem goods and services for human well-being. We are all called upon to use the International Year of Biodiversity, as well as the International Year of Forests in 2011, to further promote the conservation and sustainable management of forests on the global, regional, national and local political agendas.

I hope that this session of the Forum will mark the beginning of an even closer collaboration between the Forum and the Convention on Biological Diversity, and our sister Rio Conventions, based on the complementarities between the Convention's programme of work on forest biodiversity, and the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests.

I would like to thank the UNFF Secretariat and Bureau for the invitation to speak to you today, as well as for the close collaboration in developing the Secretary General's report on forest biodiversity. I will leave you with an African Proverb: "If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

In this spirit, I wish you every success in the work of your eighth session.

I thank you for your attention.
