



**Convention on  
Biological Diversity**



2010 International Year of Biodiversity

## **STATEMENT**

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

**ON THE OCCASION OF**

**THE WORLD WATER DAY LAUNCH EVENT**

**22 MARCH 2010  
Cali, Colombia**

*Please check against delivery*



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Life in harmony, into the future  
いのちの共生を、未来へ  
COP 10 / MOP 5

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is fitting that the biodiversity family is gathered here today in Cali to celebrate World Water Day . It is fitting that the theme of this year celebration is Clean Water for a Healthy World. It is indeed fitting to mark this event here in Colombia, one of the richest countries in the world in terms of biodiversity. It is also fitting that this celebration takes place while the international community is actively engaged in celebrating the International Year of Biodiversity which provides a unique opportunity to reflect on the role of the diversity of life on our planet in ensuring our well-being. The theme of World Water Day demonstrates the role of biodiversity and proper ecosystem management for the provision of clean water.

In our rapidly urbanizing world, clean water is a precious commodity. Water scarcity is becoming particularly acute as water use grows at more than twice the rate of populations.

Recent trends in water availability and its quality give significant cause for alarm. More than one in six people worldwide still do not have access to safe drinking water. Estimates suggest that by 2030 about half of the world's population will be living in areas of high water stress, with some 1.8 billion people living in regions with absolute water scarcity.

Most people recognize the importance of safe drinking water. Water supply is high on the public and political agendas. A recent survey even suggested that drinking water is the number one environmental concern of Americans, with 59% saying they worry "a great deal" about the issue, versus just 34% that worry about climate change.

But many citizens of rich nations take water for granted. Few people stop to think where it comes from and the role that biodiversity plays in supplying it. This is why we are pleased to release our report *Water, Wetlands and Forests: A Review of Ecological, Economic and Policy Linkages* as a contribution to awareness-raising on this important day.

At least a third of the world's largest cities obtain a significant portion of their drinking-water supply directly from forested protected areas. For example, the Chingaza and Sumapaz national parks together represent over 225,000 hectares of fragile highland forest ecosystems which are crucial for the provision of water for downstream human populations – including for the Colombian capital, Bogota, which has over eight million residents. Sustaining water supplies is a major driving force for the establishment of protected areas globally.

Water, wetlands and forests interact to produce healthy and productive ecosystems. Among the most valuable services they provide is sustaining the quality and availability of water. Forests and wetlands help capture and store water to mitigate floods in periods of heavy rain and ensure steady water flow during drier seasons. Many forests depend on groundwater for survival and rely on wetlands to replenish it. No clear boundaries exist between these ecosystems – in fact many of our forests are located in wetlands.

Poor environmental management of these ecosystems, however, tends to result in poor water quality. Significant amounts of money are spent rectifying this problem – often through expensive artificial water treatment infrastructure. The report provides evidence that this money is often more effectively spent by restoring the ability of the natural infrastructure to fix the problem for us.

A famous example is New York City, which saved several billion dollars in water investment costs by adopting an integrated water resource management approach to its watershed. These examples are repeated across many nations, including in developing countries.

Similar lessons are being learnt in Latin America, Colombia, for example, has been experimenting with water conservation funds to guarantee clean drinking water provision for Bogotá. Voluntary contributions from Bogotá's water treatment facilities and other project partners subsidize conservation projects that will keep region's rivers cleaner. One fund is projected by The Nature Conservancy to raise more than 100 billion Colombian pesos (60 million US dollars) for conservation projects over the next 10 years and the fund provides for the long-term financing of watershed conservation from the yields generated by financial markets.

Through such examples, we are learning that biodiversity conservation, public, business, economic and finance interests can work in harmony to achieve common goals of sustainable human well-being.

The water-regulation functions of forests add significantly to their value. The study on *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity* (TEEB), for example, has estimated that water supply services of tropical forests account for up to 45% of their total value, which exceeds their value for timber, tourism and carbon storage combined.

The linkages between water, wetlands and forests are one example that demonstrates the importance of managing ecosystems in their entirety. *Water, Wetlands and Forests: A Review of Ecological, Economic and Policy Linkages* provides useful information on this topic and will help us break down the barriers between different interest groups to get all stakeholders working together towards common goals. This is why we are so very pleased to release this report today.

In conclusion, I want to extend thanks to the government of Norway, which provided the resources that have allowed us to produce and launch this report simultaneously here in Cali as well as in Montreal, Canada, New York, and Nairobi.

The report also builds upon another recent publication of ours – *The Good Practice Guide to Drinking Water, Biodiversity and Development* – which provides additional simple messages and policy advice for non-specialists.

I also want to call upon you all to reflect this year on the role of biodiversity in providing for human well-being. As we prepare for the high-level session of the 65<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly and the Nagoya Biodiversity Summit, we will need to rally citizens around the world in support of biodiversity. I remind you of the slogan for the year: "*Biodiversity is life. Biodiversity is our life.*"

Thank you.