

Message by Dr. Ahmed Djoghlaif
Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity

on the occasion of

World Oceans Day

“Our oceans: opportunities and challenges”

8 June 2010

Oceans are at the centre of our life. They are the provider of the crucial goods and services required by human beings and other creatures. They regulate our climate. They are the refuge and home to so much life on our planet. Yet, they are under siege more than ever before. Today, we need to stop our unsustainable practices, focus on these vast reservoirs of our world and look at them as an important part of the web of life.

This year’s global celebration of World Oceans Day takes on added significance because 2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity. It also marks the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Jakarta Mandate in the Ministerial Statement of the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention as a new global consensus on the importance of marine and coastal biodiversity. Moreover, 2010 is only two years away from the target year set at the World Summit on Sustainable Development for the establishment of representative networks of marine protected areas.

At this historic moment, we need to take stock of the challenges ahead of us. The third edition of Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO-3), launched world-wide last month, describes the current state of world biodiversity, including marine and coastal biodiversity. Despite progress made at different levels toward meeting 2010 biodiversity target, GBO-3 alarmed the world community with gloomy news on the status of biodiversity. Multiple indicators demonstrated continuing biodiversity loss at unprecedented rate. It also identified global climate change as one of the most important driving forces behind the continuing decline of biodiversity.

Coastal habitats such as mangroves, seagrass beds, salt marshes and shellfish reefs continue to decline in extent, threatening highly valuable ecosystem services. Such decline also diminishes their ability to remove significant quantities of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

About one fifth of the world's mangroves, covering 36,000 square kilometres, were lost between 1980 and 2005. The quantity of carbon buried each year by vegetated coastal habitats has been

estimated at between 120 and 329 million tonnes, a range almost equal to the annual greenhouse gas emissions of Japan.

Tropical coral reefs, which contribute significantly to the livelihoods and security of coastal regions, have suffered a significant global decline in biodiversity since the 1970s. Between 500 million and one billion people rely on coral reefs as a food source. Coral reefs also support approximately 25 per cent of all marine fish species. This important habitat, however, faces multiple threats including overfishing, land-based pollution, and destructive fishing as well as bleaching due to increased sea temperatures.

Moreover, rising carbon-dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere will result in sea-water becoming more acidic, reducing the biocalcification of tropical and cold-water coral reefs as well as other shell-forming organisms, such as calcareous phytoplankton, and impacting the entire marine food chain. Unfortunately, we do not know yet clearly the magnitude and frequency of such risks.

Likewise, GBO-3 presented possible future outcomes for biodiversity change during the rest of the twenty-first century. Continuing species extinctions far above the historic rate, loss of habitats and changes in the distribution and abundance of species are projected throughout this century according to all scenarios. If the Earth's ecosystem are pushed beyond certain thresholds or tipping points, there is a high risk of dramatic biodiversity loss and accompanying degradation of a broad range of ecosystem services.

The challenges are considerable. But there are opportunities before us, if we act. Such irreversible changes in biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation can be prevented, significantly reduced or even reversed, only if strong action is applied urgently and comprehensively at international, national and local levels.

In this regard, the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity will adopt in Nagoya, at their meeting, a new Strategic Plan for the period 2011-2020, which contains strategic goals and targets for mobilizing urgent and comprehensive action at the international level in order to reverse the tide of rapid biodiversity loss.

Moreover, the Nagoya meeting of the Conference of the Parties will be preceded by a high-level meeting of the United Nations General Assembly in New York exclusively devoted to biodiversity.

Actions that specifically address the degradation of ocean ecosystems will be central to these discussions. We already know that some of the actions can have multiple impacts. Saving biodiversity can help us to combat climate change. Saving biodiversity can be a route to sustainable development and protect the livelihoods of communities and economies that rely on the oceans.

As evidenced in GBO-3, our common challenges are indeed overwhelming. Such challenges will not, however, stop us from creating major opportunities for biodiversity conservation during this 2010 International Year of Biodiversity.

I therefore call upon citizens and decision makers to take the steps needed to protect biodiversity in the oceans of our world. Take the steps now, so that we can say, in 2012, that it was in the International Year of Biodiversity, when we set the correct course for a sustainable future.
