



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

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**on the occasion of**

**AFRICA ENVIRONMENT DAY (WANGARI MAATHAI DAY)**

**3 March 2012**

We humans are an integral part of the intricate web of life that envelopes the Earth. Our combined individual actions shape the present, and help set the destiny of our world. When we act responsibly and are aware of the impact we have on biodiversity, we contribute to a future of life in harmony with nature. This is our responsibility to the planet, and our responsibility to ourselves.

As we celebrate Africa Environment Day, and the newly proclaimed Wangari Maathai Day, we are reminded that the life of Wangari Maathai demonstrated an acute awareness of this individual responsibility. Her role as a dedicated environmentalist, human rights activist, and agent of change was the legacy she left behind. Her actions and her words—in support of tree planting, of sustainable development and of equity—are examples of what all individuals must do if we are going to save biodiversity and realize sustainable development.

Dr. Maathai once said: “For me, one of the major reasons to move beyond just the planting of trees was that I have tendency to look at the causes of a problem. We often preoccupy ourselves with the symptoms, whereas if we went to the root cause of the problems, we would be able to overcome the problems once and for all.” Recognizing this reality, in 2010, Governments included a goal in the global Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 to address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss by mainstreaming biodiversity across government and society.

Specifically, this goal means that governments, businesses and individuals need to make choices that will protect biodiversity. For example, by governments ensuring their procurement decisions take biodiversity into account, businesses integrating biodiversity into their processes, and supply chains making consumption choices that reduce impact on biodiversity.

For Africans, the benefits of this way of being and doing business are very clear. For all Africans, the sustainable use of biodiversity – nature’s capital, is a way to harness the tremendous richness of the continent and build a green economy that can enhance jobs and livelihoods. For the poorest, sustainable use of biodiversity is the way out of absolute hardship.

Again, the words of Wangari Maathai inspire us all and call upon us to act: “We owe it to ourselves and to the next generation to conserve the environment so that we can bequeath our children a sustainable world that benefits all.”

Today, and every day, I call upon all to reflect on her life, and in our daily lives, to emulate her energy, commitment and vision for the future.

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