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Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen

The previous speakers have given us an excellent perspective on the context surrounding this meeting, in particular its importance in the processes of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and its significance in the wider issue of human development and poverty alleviation.

In the next few minutes I hope to add a perspective from UNEP's angle based on our experience in the sphere of biodiversity information management, and reporting on the state of the global environment.

Ladies and gentlemen,

we tend to take life on our blue and green Earth for granted. And yet, living organisms are *the* unique characteristic of our planet. We must be careful not to fall into the trap described by the singer Joni Mitchell. You may recall her song: "you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone". I won't try and put the music to it!

In UNEP and at the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre we have spent the past 25 years working with IUCN, WWF and other partners to describe what biodiversity the ecosystems of the world *have* got, and the rate at which it *is* going. Many of the Centre's reports and products are available here, attesting to these disturbing trends.

It is my personal hope that in some years time we will have the privilege of delivering a report to the Conference of Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity saying that the global biodiversity status is stabilised, i.e. biodiversity loss is halted, and perhaps even *reversed*. That

the situation is under control, ecosystems and their species are intact and here to stay for posterity. I wish to assure you that all the resources of the Centre and its staff are focused on this vision, but at the same time, we are fully aware of the difficulties the world faces in moving towards achieving that goal.

The 2010 target is the first step towards resolving what many believe will be the greatest challenge of this new century – keeping alive the ecosystems and dynamic ecological processes that make our planet unique, and upon which we human beings depend for our quality of life, future prosperity and even survival. It will require a concerted effort by all the stakeholders represented here today: governments, the UN family, MEAs, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations, the private sector and civil society.

These organisations can all work together in different ways but especially through the five global conventions dealing with biodiversity, through the Millennium Development Goals, and through the many Partnerships that are an integral part of the process of implementing the agenda agreed at the World Summit last September.

But the 2010 challenge is fraught with difficulties. And the first of these is that not everyone believes biodiversity is as important as we all do. We have to *communicate* the issues more effectively, and more convincingly. The term biodiversity and its importance in our everyday lives has *not* yet been well explained to policy-makers and the general public. It is the public that ultimately drives political as well as the consumptive and non-consumptive trends and priorities. Until our

message is better understood, biodiversity will remain low on the political and economic priority list.

We have a breathing space. The nation states at Johannesburg accepted our concerns, but arguably on trust rather than on hard evidence. They have given us time to prove the case, to monitor the trends, and to show improvements through direct action. We were given our first shot at the problem at Rio, and created the Biodiversity Convention. At Johannesburg we have gained a second chance with the 2010 target. But now we have to get it right because there may be no third chance for biodiversity.

Do we have the knowledge we need? Yes, I believe much of the understanding needed to explain and address the problem is available on our scientific shelves. The nations that have worked together under the Convention of Biological Diversity have defined the term biodiversity in terms of genes, species and ecosystems. Most importantly, they have understood that biodiversity is continually changing and interactive, and that we ourselves are a part of ecosystem processes, with the power to exert a dynamic positive or negative impact on those processes.

But we need champions and high level communicators to get the message across. We need to make our information relevant to and heard by ministers of agriculture, forestry and fisheries as well as ministers of environment. Compare the biodiversity situation with the climate change process. The Climate Change Convention has an Intergovernmental Panel of Experts that produces regular, highly respected scientific reports that explain the impact of climate change in terms of *crops, floods, diseases*. These attract interest from all sectors of society, including business. In

the CBD process we don't have such a Panel, and maybe we don't need one in quite the same way. But we *do* need a process of *some kind* that delivers objective scientific reports derived from expert organisations worldwide, together with the sort of public message that touches people's hearts, homes and, dare I say, wallets.

Of course, as everyone here knows, the science of biodiversity is *far* more complex than climate change, and unfortunately our understanding of biodiversity is still relatively basic! This complexity is the *second* of our great challenges. We need to improve the quality of our biodiversity knowledge, and to make it more relevant to human development. We have to find ways of simplifying the data, establishing indicators and surrogates that can be widely understood and measured.

The scientific community has been busy cataloguing the data of biodiversity for several hundred years. It is not complete and may never be so, and that empirical effort must go on. But our purpose here is to meet the 2010 target, and there is certainly enough data, information and knowledge to decide how we can do *that*. The problem is making the information accessible and relevant for this purpose. We need to make the information comparable from one year to another and one place to another. It needs to be usable and relevant at different scales so that communities, nations and the global community have a shared understanding of the problem and vision of the solutions. We need to ensure that it is regularly updated so as to constitute a reliable basis for policy decisions and actions taken by the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Measuring biodiversity and defining indicators has proved difficult in the past, and the effort has been characterised by lack of agreement.

Taxonomists and ecologists have worked hard to impose order on a fundamentally chaotic living world that in reality lacks the clear boundaries between populations, species or ecosystems that we like to formulate for our planning. In our meeting this week we should not try to resolve these scientific challenges. Instead we should search for practical ways to use what we know, what is already being measured, the mechanisms, organisations and processes that exist, and find ways to channel these assets towards our common purpose.

Common purpose. This is the third and final challenge that I would like to touch upon. Stakeholders like yourselves come at biodiversity from a host of different angles. CBD's sister biodiversity-related conventions address migratory species, wetlands, heritage sites and wildlife trade, all of which are vitally important. Ways should be found for them all, as well as other regional MEAs to adopt the 2010 target, and to help monitor progress. In this common purpose there is a renewed opportunity to harmonise activities and reporting across conventions, and to seek interlinkages and enhance synergies in their objectives.

We also have a unique opportunity to mobilise the many conservation NGOs with unique experience and skills, human resources and data that can also be shaped and focused towards the 2010 target. But they will need to know that governments are serious about 2010. Indigenous peoples and local communities will want reassurance that their intellectual property is protected and their contributions recognised and rewarded. In return I hope all stakeholders will contribute to the new style

of partnerships and alliances that cut across the boundaries of the past, and contribute to the shared goal of 2010.

The private sector too will need to play its part. And not just by minimising its impact on the living world, but also by bringing business skills to bear on the recognition of biodiversity as an ecosystem commodity with a value. And like all ecosystem-based commodities, biodiversity abundance needs to be firstly assured through conservation for it then to be exploited and used in a sustainable manner and with a long term cost/benefit perspective. This means finding new ways to

- promote effective conservation measures;
- encourage a sustainable use ethic;
- promote controlled or regulated access to the components of biodiversity,
- and formulate mechanisms to share the benefits equitably, particularly with developing countries whose role as stewards of biodiversity has been undervalued and unappreciated for too long.

There is a worry that failure to provide such access and benefit-sharing safeguards will limit our ability to mobilise the information needed to monitor and address the 2010 target. We need safeguards in place to enable all countries to contribute openly to our common goal of monitoring the benefits arising from biodiversity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

the Convention on Biological Diversity is the first global, comprehensive agreement to address all aspects of biological diversity. It recognises for the first time that biodiversity is a “common concern of humankind”. The World Summit on Sustainable Development reaffirmed the key role of

the CBD in implementing the biodiversity targets in the Plan of Implementation, including the 2010 target. Last February UNEP's Governing Council reiterated the importance of the WSSD process and of the CBD, and directed UNEP and UNEP-WCMC to provide support in monitoring and achieving this goal. Our work in helping to organise this meeting in London is the first step. As part of the UNEP family, we look forward to hearing the recommendations arising from the workshops, and figuring out how we can all work together in partnership to achieve the 2010 target.

Thank you very much indeed.

This brings to a close our opening session, and we can break for coffee, but before doing so may I invite you to express your appreciation to the Minister and speakers for their support to our meeting.