



# TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

PERMANENT MISSION OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO TO THE UNITED NATIONS  
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## STATEMENT

by

**Dr. the Honourable Roodal Moonilal**

**Minister of Housing and the Environment**

of the

**Republic of Trinidad and Tobago**

at the

**High-level Meeting as a contribution  
to the International Year of Biodiversity  
at the 65<sup>th</sup> session of the  
United Nations General Assembly**



United Nations Headquarters  
New York  
September 22, 2010

Thank you  
Madam/Mr. Co-chairman,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago stands firmly committed to the objectives and the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Biosfety Protocol.

The biodiversity of Trinidad and Tobago is the most varied of the islands in the Caribbean archipelago due to the continental origin of our landmass. The range of biological resources and the relatively high number of endemic species supported by Trinidad and Tobago, in combination with that of the other Caribbean Islands and continental states, demonstrates the region's value as an area of biological interest and underscores the importance of the sustainable management of these resources.

The biodiversity resources are of great importance to all sectors of society in Trinidad and Tobago, mainly in rural communities, which depend upon a variety of wild flora and fauna for their existence through hunting, fishing, craft, tour guiding and other nature-based activities.

In recognition of the importance of the efficient management of the country's biological resources toward the goal of sustainable development, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has been pursuing a number of initiatives aimed at sustainably managing its biological resources. These include:

- Introduction of a National reforestation and watershed protection programme. This project is designed to re-establish forest cover by rehabilitating large areas of degraded watersheds on which the nation's water supply is dependent. Projected results include, improved protection of watersheds; flood mitigation; increased aquifer recharge; preservation of biodiversity; environmental and aesthetic enhancement.
- Declaration of Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Species
- Restoration of the Nariva Swamp Ramsar Site, which serves as an example of biodiversity conservation, greenhouse gas mitigation and adaptation to climate change
- Strengthening the environmental policy framework through the revision of the National Forest Policy and the development of a Protected Areas Policy
- Operationalization of the Green Fund which will provide grant funding to community groups and non-governmental organizations for environmental conservation projects.

This would encourage and facilitate these groups and organizations to take greater responsibility and ownership in the stewardship of the country's environment.

The existing legislative framework allows us to meet most of the obligations to the Convention, however we recognise the need to continuously review approaches in light of sustainable development objectives. In this regard, we are currently looking at the revision of the Forest Policy and a Protected Areas Policy that will realise changes to the legislative and institutional arrangements for forest and biodiversity management.

In recent years Global Climate Change has been negatively impacting the sustainability of our biological resources, including:

- Coral bleaching
- Drying out of wetland environments
- Harsher dry seasons resulting in increasing susceptibility to forest fires
- Increasing intensity of hurricanes and tropical storms which not only devastates the man-made/urban environment but also damages or compromises major ecosystems such as forests, coral reefs and wetland systems.

These are not problems which avail themselves to simple solutions. In fact, they comprise the most formidable environmental, social and economic problems confronting mankind today, and need to be tackled at national, regional and international levels. Trinidad and Tobago has drafted a national climate change policy that is intended to work in harmony with the forest and protected areas policy to provide a holistic approach to managing our biodiversity resources. In fulfillment of our mandate to implement the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has made every effort, within its human resource, technical and financial capacity, toward the achievement of the 2010 biodiversity target. The upcoming Tenth Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) of the Convention on Biodiversity is expected to adopt revised biodiversity targets and a Strategic Plan for addressing global biodiversity loss for the post-2010 period. There is general consensus that based on assessments on the 2010 target, which was established in 2002 as an ambitious political commitment to reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010, that that target will not be achieved. This begs the question: Is it possible that such a broad target was too vague, making it difficult to measure achievements? In 2004, the CBD COP developed indicators based on seven focal areas in an attempt to measure attainment of the 2010 target but these targets also lacked timescales and too wide ranging in scope so as to make measurement feasible.

As a small island developing state with limited land space, Trinidad and Tobago is challenged by competing land-use demands and requirements which sometimes conflict with biodiversity conservation. The developmental agenda requiring infrastructure expansion, increased acreage

for agriculture and the conversion of land for housing invariably results in negative impacts on biodiversity. Such impacts are compounded by the vulnerability of small island developing states to the impacts of climate change and sea level rise as well as the susceptibility to invasive species. The summation of these conflicts makes the achievement of any long-term biodiversity target difficult.

The ability of small island developing states to meaningfully conserve biological resources is hampered by capacity constraints and the inadequate mobilization of new and additional financial resources. It is therefore imperative to address such issues in order to empower small island developing states to achieve any post- 2010 target.

In preparing its Fourth National Report to the CBD, Trinidad and Tobago has encountered difficulty in quantifying the status, trends and threats to biological resources in accurate terms. Furthermore it proves to be a time consuming and technically difficult exercise to reconcile observed changes in our country's ecosystems with indices assigned by the Convention, especially when this information comes from multiple sources covering a wide range of biological resources.

Based on this experience, Trinidad and Tobago proposes that the post-2010 biodiversity target should:

- be concrete, with clearly defined operational objectives and well established realistic baselines and timescales;
- build upon that of 2010 and learn from the setting and likely non-achievement of that target;
- be of relevance to prevailing economic climates where its goals are not discordant with developmental needs; and
- establish short-term targets and indicators to assess achievement.

We believe that at the global level this would facilitate the positioning of biodiversity conservation at the top of the international political agenda, while making it more accessible to the public consciousness at the national level.

In closing, Trinidad and Tobago looks forward to a successful outcome to the upcoming Conference of Parties on Biological Diversity and the adoption of a post 2010 biodiversity target that is visionary, measurable, realistic and achievable.

I thank you.