



**THE STATE OF ERITREA
MINISTRY OF LAND, WATER, AND ENVIRONMENT
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT**



**REPORT ON THE CELEBRATION OF INTERNATIONAL
DAY FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY (IDB)
IN ERITREA 22 MAY 2012**

"Marine and Coastal Biodiversity"



10 June 2012: Asmara, Eritrea

The Celebration of the IDB 22 May 2012 in Eritrea



The Celebration of the IDB 22 May 2012 was celebrated in Eritrea under the theme of “Marine and Coastal Biodiversity”. Different activities were carried out.

These are: Addressing

- general environmental concerns
- the CBD message of the year
- status of Eritrean Marine and Coastal Biodiversity
- distributing brochures
- posting in to newspapers
- planting mangrove seedlings





The International Day for Biodiversity (IDB), 22 May 2012, was celebrated in Eritrea under the theme of *'Marine and Coastal Biodiversity'*. This year's theme coincides with the Government of Eritrea (GoE) priority of food security through fish industry. This year's IDB was celebrated through the participation of various stakeholders. On May 22, 2012 people were engaged in planting mangrove seedlings along the coast of Eritrean Red Sea in Massawa about 115 km from the capital city, Asmara. IDB has been celebrated in Eritrea since March 1996- Eritrea's accession to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

As per the agreement made between the Honorable Minister of Ministry of Land, Water and Environment, Mr. Tesfay Gebreslassie and the Honorable Minister of Ministry of Marine Resources, Mr. Tewelde Kelati, It was decided that this year's IDB would be celebrated through the participation of people in mangrove planting along the coastal area thereby ensuring sustainability of the issue and contributing to marine and coastal biodiversity. Moreover, the Ministry of Land, Water and Environment, on the occasion of the day, prepared an official message of the IDB 2012, brochures, and the same message was also posted in the national mass media which have a good coverage all over the country to raise the awareness of the people.

To make a successful IDB celebration day, a technical committee from both the Department of Environment of the Ministry of Land, Water and Environment and the Ministry of marine Resources was established. Via the committee a programme was set. In that Day a general message about the environmental concerns were addressed by Mr. Tsehaye Si'le, head of branch office of the Ministry of Land, Water and Environment, in Northern Red Sea Zone. He stated that our environment has been affected by many challenges. Such as pollution, deforestation, land degradation, desertification, climate change, Invasive Alien Species etc. He added that these challenges are at their critical points. They are affecting our live and the economy of the country in general. To solve such problems it is timely to raise the awareness of the people and facilitate their participation in the conservation of biodiversity. Moreover, capacity building in terms human, organizational of all those involved in the management of biodiversity conservation has to be considered as a priority and reasonable investment put upon.



Fig.1. Mr. Tsehaye Si'le, head of branch office of the Ministry of Land, Water and Environment, in Northern Red Sea Zone, addressing general environmental concerns. Massawa. Eritrea



After that, Mr. Mogos Woldeyohannes, Director General of the Department of Environment of the Ministry of Land, Water and Environment addressed the CBD message. “Marine and Coastal Biodiversity” is the theme for this year’s IDB. Designation of IDB 2012 on the theme provides Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and every one interested in marine life, the opportunity to raise awareness of the issue and increase practical action of Biodiversity conservation.



Fig.2. Mr. Mogos Woldeyohannes, Director General of the Department of Environment of the Ministry of Land, Water and Environment addressing the message from the CBD. Massawa, Eritrea

He said that” most of the surface area of the globe is covered with ocean. From sandy shores to the darkest depths of the sea, the ocean and coasts support a rich form of life, from kelp forests that sway beneath the waves, to vents on the seabed through which super-heated water and gases erupt, supporting a unique ecosystem that few humans have ever seen; from polar bears that and seals across the sea ice of the Arctic, to tiny photosynthesizing plants called phytoplankton that provides enormous oxygen on earth”. Source: CBD notification, 2012).

He also addressed that “people have lived near and fished from the ocean for thousands of years: today, an estimated 41 percent of the world’s population lives within 100k.m of the coast, and fisheries provide over 15% of the dietary intake of animal protein, from 2000-2010 scientists set out to try and determine how much life is in the sea; based on their findings 1,200 species have been added to the former number; at this time the species number has reached to around 250,000;but this number doesn’t include such as viruses ;in their final report they suggested that it could be at least a million”(Source: CBD notification ,2012).

He also addressed that “the challenge facing marine biodiversity is unprecedented. This due to :commercial overexploitation of world’s fish stock ;solid and liquid wastes and hazardous chemicals; natural disaster; coastal urbanization; Invasive Alien Species; global warming ; habitat destruction etc; thus this year’s IDB is announced to be celebrated under the theme of “Marine and Coastal Biodiversity” to raise the public awareness broadly; in addition, it is agreed that by 2020 the cover of marine and coastal protected areas of the world to be increased from the current 1% to 10%. “(Source: CBD notification, 2012).



Fig.3. Stakeholders attending the message from the CBD. Massawa, Eritrea

He also addressed that “the international community’s growing concern over the unprecedented loss of biological diversity initiated negotiations for legally binding instrument aimed at reversing this alarming trend and the birth of the convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).The CBD was finalized in Nairobi in May 1992 and opened for signature at the United Nations Conference on Environmental and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro on 5 June 1992.” Source: CBD notification, 2012).

He stated that Eritrea accessed to the CBD on 21st March 1996 and has been celebrating since 1996. He added that the policy objectives of the Government of Eritrea on the Integrated Coastal Area management. He elaborated them as the sustainable use of the coast for housing, tourism, recreation, ocean access, maritime industry, commercial and other activities in appropriately designated areas; the location of coastal facilities and development that takes into account coastal process including erosion, accretion, storm surge, tides, wave conditions, sea level criteria; protection of public foreshore areas(set back) and their access on the coast including islands; the protection, conservation and enhancement of assets such as landscape, natural resources or indigenous and cultural values.

After the CBD message was addressed, Mr. Efrem Kiflemariam, IDB National Coordinator, stated that the message for this year emphasized the need to conserve biodiversity in general and Marine and Coastal Biodiversity in particular, so as to ensure sustainability of the different biodiversity and ensure food security. He also highlighted that the Eritrean marine, islands and coastal environment are amazingly diverse and include vibrant coral reefs, mangrove, flourishing sea grass beds, sea turtle, whales, dolphins, dugongs etc. The intertidal and near shore zones support a diverse range of marine and terrestrial species and are key areas of ecological and economic importance, especially fishing and tourism industry. It provides shelter to some globally endangered species such as: Green and hawksbill turtles, and dugongs. Sea and shore birds are common in this area. There are also terrestrial wild lives around the coastal area. Such as: African wild ass, Dorcas gazelle, and Sommering’s gazelle, Ostrich etc. Out of which African wild ass and Sommering’s gazelle are globally endangered wild animals. Plants, like halophytic shrubs, Dom palm and others live in this coastal area.





Fig.4. Mr. Efreem Kiflemariam, IDB National Coordinator, addressing the status of Eritrean Marine and Coastal Biodiversity. :Massawa, Eritrea

He stressed that the Eritrean marine and coastal biodiversity has many threats. Such as habitat destruction (mangrove, coral reefs, sea grasses), solid and liquid wastes, Invasive Alien Species, illegal fishing and hunting, collecting of rare/endemic ornamental fish, sea waves, climate change etc.

He added that the Government of Eritrea has conducted a lot of activities to conserve the marine and coastal biodiversity. He also addressed that it is timely to take the most important actions like: establishing Protected Area System, enhancing mangrove afforestation, prohibit habitat destruction, avoid catching/hunting endangered species, promote proper land use through environmental impact assessment (EIA) procedures, enacting for marine and coastal regulation, increase institutional and human capacity building and promote public awareness programme.

After that Mr. Amanuel Yemane, Manger of the Manzhar Project of the Ministry of Marine Resources, highlighted that Mangrove forest is found as patches along the coast of the Red Sea, especially where some seasonal freshwater runoff occurs; and in low lying, poorly draining areas behind dune ridges which are flooded infrequently. He said that the dominant species of mangrove in Eritrea is *Avicenna marina*, the most salt and temperature tolerant of the mangrove species found in Africa. The other mangrove species found along the Eritrean coastline are *Rhizophora mucronata* and *Ceriops tagal*. A fourth species *Brughieria gymnorrhiza* is reported historically to occur along the Eritrean coast, but has yet to be recorded. He added that most extensive mangrove in Eritrea is found near Assab bay and in patches around Tio. He stated that on the islands, there are dense mangrove forests on Museri, Dissei, Norah, Harena, and Dergamman Kebir. There are also some patches near Mersa Deresa and Mersa Mubarek in the north.



*Fig.5. Mr. Amanuel Yemane, Manger of the Manzhar Project of the Ministry of Marine Resources, describing on General view on Mangrove forest.
: Massawa, Eritrea*

He also stated that mangrove plays an important role for human well being and for ecosystem integrity within the broader coastal environment and these include: wildlife habitat, coastal protection, soil formation, organic material production, and nursery for many marine species. In addition, mangrove provides wood and none wood benefits to human, including timber, fuel, fodder for camels and sheep. He addressed a continued loss of mangrove has been witnessed in the past. Study conducted by the Eritrean Coastal Marine and Island Biodiversity Project (2005) showed a net loss of about 3.57 km² of mangrove forest between 1985 and 2000. The main causes for the loss of this habitat are: cutting by the local population for fuel and construction over-browsing by camels; the diminished inflows of fresh water from the hills and the apparently reduced the supply of nutrients, particularly nitrogen, iron and phosphorus. Finally, he concluded by saying that “**No mangrove means No fish**”.

According to the programme, participants were informed to plant mangrove seedlings and each participant planted five seedlings along the selected site of the sea coast.





Fig. 6. Participants planting mangrove seedlings along the coast. : Massawa, Eritrea

After all activities of that day performed, Mr. Mogos appreciated that such kind of integrated work among stakeholders made a successful day. He also said that mangrove afforestation is one of the most important activities in minimizing the threats of marine and coastal biodiversity. He also called mangrove afforestation should be conducted widely by communities, students and government officials along the coastal area.

Finally, he announced that the conservation of biodiversity is not just a job left for a few institutions but each and every individual has a role to play in changing the trend and passing it to future generations. He also called that all should reaffirm the commitment on the occasion of the international day for biological diversity.



IDB 22 May 2012 National Coordinator

Mr. Efreem Kiflemariam, National Biodiversity/Biosafety Coordinator
Ministry of Land, Water and Environment
Department of Environment
Asmara, Eritrea

IDB 22 May 2012 Provisional National Committee

Mr. Dawit Tewelde, Environmental Assessment Expert
Ministry of Land, Water and Environment
Department of Environment
Asmara, Eritrea

Mr. Issac Gbiorghis, Environmental Assessment Expert
Ministry of Land, Water and Environment
Department of Environment
Asmara, Eritrea

Mr. Hager Asrat, Environmental Assessment Expert
Ministry of Land, Water and Environment
Department of Environment
Asmara, Eritrea

Mr. Manuel Beyene, Manager of the Manzhar Project
Ministry of Marine Resources
Massawa, Eritrea

Mr. Semere, Environmental Expert
Branch Office of the Ministry of Land, Water and Environment
Department of Environment
Massawa, Eritrea

Ministry of Land, Water and Environment
Department of Environment
Tel.No.291-1-120311
Fax.No.291-1-126095
PO.Box.5713
Denden Street
Asmara, Eritrea

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