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## United Nations to fight species loss

Tuesday, January 12, 2010

**In the first of a series of articles following the launch of the International Year of Biodiversity, executive secretary of the UN Convention, Ahmed Djoghlaf, outlines what can be done to overcome immense and often hidden tragedy**

The variety of organisms on Earth and the ecosystems they create help make the planet uniquely habitable for humans. That is why seven years ago, the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity established the 2010 Biodiversity Target, a commitment to significantly slow biodiversity loss worldwide by 2010. It is also why the past three meetings of G8 environment ministers have endorsed the 2010 target, putting biodiversity loss on the agenda at G8 summits in Heiligendamm in 2007, Hokkaido/Toyako in 2008, and L'Aquila in 2009.

2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity (IYB), a first-time occurrence in the history of the United Nations. Many important events will take place during the year-long celebrations. For the time in history, a one day, high level meeting of Heads of State and Government exclusively devoted to biodiversity will be held in New York, on 20th September 2010, during the 65th session of the UN General Assembly. In October, the 10th Conference of the Parties to the Convention (COP10) will take place in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, where we will finalise a comprehensive post-2010 strategy for stopping biodiversity loss in the years to come. IYB will close in December in Kanazawa/Ishikawa, coinciding with the launch of the 2011 International Year of Forests. The overall goal of IYB is to raise public awareness and engage people everywhere in the fight to protect life on Earth.

The stakes in the struggle to save biodiversity are extremely high. This is particular true for poor people, who will be hit hardest by continued biodiversity loss. 300 million people worldwide, the majority poor, are estimated to depend substantially on forest biodiversity for their survival and livelihood. And yet about 13 million hectares of the world's forests are lost due to deforestation each year. 1 billion people depend on fish as their sole or main source of animal protein. And yet about half of marine stocks worldwide were fully exploited in 2005, while another one-quarter were overexploited, depleted or recovering from depletion. Coral reefs provide food and livelihood for most of the estimated 30 million small-scale fishers in the developing world. And yet 60% of coral reefs could be lost by 2030 through fishing damage, pollution, disease, invasive alien species and coral bleaching.

The problem of biodiversity loss is exacerbated by its links to climate change. Deforestation is currently estimated to be responsible for 20% of annual human-induced CO2 emissions, as forests account for as much as 80% of the total above-ground terrestrial carbon. Conversely, climate change is projected to become one of the main drivers of biodiversity loss in the future: approximately 10% of species assessed so far have an increasingly high risk of extinction for every 1oC rise in global mean surface temperature, a trend that is expected to hold true up to at least a 5oC increase.

Biodiversity loss also has economic repercussions. Approximately half of synthetic drugs have a natural origin, including 10 of the 25 highest selling drugs in the United States of America. Of all the anti-cancer drugs available, 42% are natural and 34% semi-natural. Coral reef recreation has been estimated at US\$184 per visit globally, while global coastal capture fisheries yield a minimum total of US\$34bn annually. Overall, the international community is estimated to currently be experiencing a welfare loss of land-based ecosystem services of about €50bn each year, with a projected cumulative loss of €14trillion by 2050, or 7% of projected global GDP.

Given the many negative effects of biodiversity loss, a key challenge for 2010 will be drawing new constituencies into our preservation efforts. Protecting biodiversity needs to be an explicit part of strategies to address, inter alia, poverty, climate change, water scarcity and international conflict. The value of biodiversity also needs to be mainstreamed into our economic activities. The Kobe Biodiversity Dialogue held in October 2009 was a major step in this direction. Indeed, broadening our circle of partnerships will be a key challenge for years to come, and thus will be central to the Convention's post-2010 strategy.

Other challenges for 2010 relate to science and policy. First, we need to develop extensive biodiversity indicators and monitoring programmes: in order to effectively slow biodiversity loss, we require precise data on its distribution and rate. The lack of comprehensive, standardised data is currently being addressed by the Biodiversity Indicators Partnership (BIP), a collaborative project between several international organisations to systematically track global changes in biodiversity levels. BIP and similar projects at regional, national and local levels need to be encouraged and supported. A related issue is efficiently translating scientific research on biodiversity loss into policy options. The possible establishment of an Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, akin to the highly successful Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, is being discussed. The Ministers of Environment of Germany and Japan acting as COP9 and COP10 Presidents have expressed their strong support for such a mechanism, which will build on and complement the work being carried out by the scientific body of the Convention.

A sound science base and clear policy options are particularly important for the anticipated development of quantitative, post-2010 biodiversity targets in Nagoya, potentially for 2020 and 2050. A first step in this direction will be taken by the upcoming third edition of Global Biodiversity Outlook, peer reviewed by the CBD, its scientific bodies and the scientific community at large. GBO3 will provide an overview of the relevant science and experience base, as well as a projection of future changes in biodiversity levels and possible response measures.

Overall, the challenge we face both during 2010 and beyond is to develop and implement comprehensive, long-term solutions to the biodiversity crisis. This challenge is daunting, but I am confident that through dedication and collaborative effort, our goals will be met. The Aichi-Nagoya Biodiversity Summit is sure to be a landmark event in the life of the Convention on Life on Earth. The 13th Century Japanese Zen master Dogen said: "Something you want badly enough can always be gained. No matter how fierce the



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enemy...or how carefully guarded the treasure, there is always a means to the goal for the earnest seeker." No task today is more important than saving biodiversity: the quality of life of future generations greatly depends on the success of our efforts.

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PSCA International Ltd, Ebenezer House, Ryecroft, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire ST5 2UB  
 Tel: +44 (0)1782 740088. Fax: +44 (0)1782 740066. www.publicservice.co.uk  
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