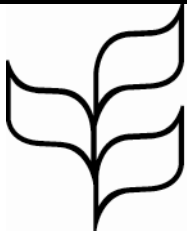




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**Convention on
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CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE
CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
Tenth meeting
Nagoya, Japan, 19-30 October 2010

**INFORMAL REPORT OF THE HIGH-LEVEL MEETING OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY, HELD 22 SEPTEMBER 2010, AS A CONTRIBUTION TO THE
INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF BIODIVERSITY**

Note by the Executive Secretary

The Executive Secretary is circulating herein, for the information of participants in the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, an informal report of the High-level Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, held on 22 September 2010, as a contribution to the International Year of Biodiversity.

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Background

In its decision IX/33 the Conference of the Parties requested that the United Nations General Assembly convene in 2010, as a contribution to the International Year of Biodiversity, a one-day high-level segment of the General Assembly, with participation of Heads of State, Governments and delegations.

The General Assembly decided to convene such a high-level meeting on Wednesday, 22 September 2010. It encouraged all Member States to be represented at the highest possible level, including by Heads of State or Government and decided that the meeting will be structured around an opening plenary meeting followed by thematic panels in the morning and afternoon, organized within existing resources, and will address in a balanced manner the three objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity*.

It further decided that the meeting would be chaired by the President of the General Assembly and requested the President to prepare a summary of the discussions held during the high level meeting for presentation at the closing plenary and transmission, under his authority, to the tenth session of the Conference of the Parties to be held in Nagoya, Japan in October 2010 as a contribution to raising awareness of the three objectives of the Convention.

High-level meeting on biodiversity, 22 September 2010-10-04

At the high-level meeting on biodiversity, delegates had before them a note by the Secretary-General (document A/64/865). The note covers topics including framing the post-2010 biodiversity strategy and ensuring the means for implementing it; deriving benefits from biodiversity for development and poverty alleviation; and ensuring that measures to meet the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change are mutually supportive and reinforcing.

Opening plenary session

JOSEPH DEISS, President of the General Assembly, said biological diversity was at the heart of life. In declaring 2010 the International Year of Biodiversity, the Assembly had launched an invitation to take action to safeguard the biodiversity of life on Earth. Holding a General Assembly meeting was a welcome contribution to the International Year, he said, noting that it was often difficult to be aware of biodiversity's importance, in particular the risk of losing it.

He said biodiversity worldwide was declining through human action, adding that climate change was also contributing to the problem. The combined effects hampered efforts to attain the Millennium Development Goals, and the consequences would be more onerous for the poorest, since many areas of declining biodiversity were situated in developing countries. It was heartening that the international community was mobilizing to deal with the threat. While the relevant Millennium Goal had not been achieved, many States had taken measures to protect biodiversity, and initiatives were being taken to assess the economic value of ecosystems, he said.

In June 2009, the international community had decided to create an intergovernmental platform to fill the gap separating Governments from scientific knowledge of ecosystems, he recalled. Next month, the Tenth Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity would be held in Nagoya, Japan, to adopt a new strategic plan. It was to be hoped that today's discussions would provide a useful contribution to the negotiations there, in order to ensure that the new plan was ambitious and feasible. Preserving biodiversity was inseparable from the fight against poverty and the struggle to improve health

* Resolutions 63/219 of 25 February 2009 and 64/203 of 14 December 2009

and security for the present and future generations, he said in conclusion. “Preserving biodiversity is not a luxury, it is a duty.”

BAN KI-MOON, Secretary-General of the United Nations, said that conserving the planet’s species and habitats was central to sustainable development and the Millennium Development Goals. With 2010 marking the International Year of Biodiversity and the international community’s deadline for substantially reducing the rate of biodiversity loss, that target would not be met. The third *Global Biodiversity Outlook* report indicated that the global decline in biological diversity was accelerating, while science showed that humankind’s actions had pushed extinctions up to 1,000 times the natural background rate. Human activity, including deforestation, changes in habitat and land degradation, was to blame, and the growing impact of climate change was compounding the problem.

Pointing out that the poor were the hardest hit, he said too many people still failed to grasp the implications of the destruction. Many still believed that the Earth was humankind’s to use as it liked. That argument betrayed a woeful ignorance of the importance of ecosystems to the well-being of species, climate regulation, water supplies and food security. “In this International Year, we need to demonstrate the concrete beliefs of investing in biodiversity,” he said. “We need to show that protecting ecosystems can help us achieve the Millennium Development Goals and build resilience to climate change.”

Worldwide, ecosystems were a massive undervalued subsidy provided by the environment, he continued. When their services were lost through mismanagement, crops failed, profits dropped, people became poorer and economies suffered. Pointing to the human cost of deforestation in Haiti and Ethiopia, or the United States dustbowl of the 1930s, he said last year’s financial crisis had been a wake-up call to Governments on the perils of failing to oversee and regulate complex relationships that affected everyone. The biodiversity crisis was no different. “We are bankrupting our natural economy. We need to fashion a rescue package before it is too late,” he stressed.

In October, the 193 States parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity would meet in Japan and adopt a new strategic plan on biodiversity and a 2050 biodiversity vision, he said. That overarching international framework had resulted from a comprehensive and inclusive two-year process. It called for concrete national targets before Rio+20, the engagement of all stakeholders and the inclusion of biodiversity considerations across all sectors of society. It included means of implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. It would address the important issues of access to genetic resources and equitable sharing of the benefits derived from them. “It is a solid plan, on paper. But it will need leadership to bring it to life,” he said.

That meant leadership from ministers of the environment, finance and planning, economic production and transport, health and social welfare, he continued. “Moreover, we must stop thinking of environmental protection as a cost. It is an investment that goes hand in hand with the other investments that you, as Heads of State and Government, must make to consolidate economic growth and human well-being in your countries.” Maintaining and restoring the planet’s natural infrastructure could provide economic gains worth trillions of dollars annually, he said, emphasizing that allowing it to decline was “like throwing money out the window”. He said in conclusion: “I urge all leaders present today to commit to reducing biodiversity loss. This will be your legacy — your gift to generations to come.”

ABDULLAH M. ALSAIDI (Yemen), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said the natural wealth of biodiversity was critical for developing countries. At the same time, those countries were a treasure trove of biodiversity and home to some of the rarest species, which in turn held valuable genetic resources. Today, species were disappearing at up to 1,000 times the natural rate of extinction. “It is the poor of the world who will suffer the most if we do not stop the loss of our biological resources, since the poor depend disproportionately on biodiversity for their day-to-day livelihoods,” he said.

Calling for the urgent and mutually supportive implementation of the Convention's three objectives, he said the conservation of biodiversity could not be achieved without the sustainable use of genetic resources and the fair and equitable sharing of their benefits. The three pillars of the Convention were not only important to the development of developing countries, but provided important tools in the fight against poverty. Global partnerships and international commitments must be strengthened to ensure that the owners of biodiversity resources and the traditional knowledge associated with them — which were mainly developing countries — benefited from the use of those resources.

He went on to point out that developing countries would not realize the Millennium Development Goals without addressing the international threats to biodiversity, in particular the misappropriation of genetic resources and "biopiracy". To that end, the adoption of the protocol on access and benefit sharing at the Nagoya meeting was of strategic importance. The challenges of continuing biodiversity loss, compounded by climate change, required the full engagement of all stakeholders, as well as the active engagement of all Governments, without exception, he stressed.

Reiterating the call by the Group of 77 and China on the sole remaining country yet to accede to the Convention to do so as soon as possible, he said the Group was committed to finalizing the draft Multi-Year Plan of Action for South-South Cooperation on Biodiversity for Development. In that regard, it welcomed the First South-South Cooperation Forum on Biodiversity for Development, to be held in Nagoya on 17 October. "More than ever, the establishment of a global alliance for protecting life on Earth is required," he said. "This unique event offers us a unique opportunity as leaders of the world to provide leadership and lead by example for the benefit of life on Earth."

IZABELLA TEIXEIRA, Minister for the Environment of Brazil, recalled that her country had hosted the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in 2006. As a megadiverse country, Brazil was aware of the strategic value of biodiversity and the attention and urgency that must be dedicated to conserving it. Regarding the resolution proclaiming the International Year, she said now was the time to transform words and political discussions into action. "We should pave the way for a more sustainable society, since what we have at present is quite a disturbing picture." Not only had the world been unable to reduce the rate or speed of biodiversity loss, as set out in the 2002 Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, but indicators pointed to a growing deterioration of biodiversity worldwide.

One of the key messages of the 2005 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment was that during the past century, certain economic sectors had benefited from the conversion of natural ecosystems and biodiversity exploitation, she said. However, those gains had been achieved at the cost of growing losses of biodiversity, ecosystem degradation and increased poverty. "We need strong and determined responses and political will to change this scenario, in particular in the run-up to the Rio+20 Conference," she said. Brazil was doing its part, she said, pointing out that the most recent *Global Biodiversity Outlook* listed the country as one of the few to have contributed to improving the situation. Brazil had created the greatest number of new protected areas in recent years, in addition to having reduced deforestation rates to historical lows. However, much remained to be done, she cautioned.

Highlighting the important outcome of establishing the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) in the Republic of Korea, she said that by creating adequate links between science, policymaking and capacity-building to provide credible and relevant information on biodiversity and ecosystems, IPBES would improve the international community's understanding of the need for immediate action against biodiversity loss, as well as the consequences of inaction. The lasting success of conservation efforts would rest on the decisions to be made during the upcoming Tenth Conference of the Parties, she said.

She said the States parties had been negotiating a protocol on access and benefit sharing, which was fundamental to overcoming the Convention's implementation deficit and combating biopiracy, as well as

a new post-2010 plan and a new strategy for resource mobilization. Those three elements must be considered and negotiated with attention and urgency. In addition, a central part of future efforts must include support for national efforts to meet targets on biodiversity and ensure country ownership. They must be supported by predictable, increased and sufficient resources and technology. She stressed the need to “rescue the spirit of the Rio-92 Conference”, which had led to the adoption of the Convention. “I call on all to renew that same sentiment of commitment, of political will, and of ethical-moral responsibility for the well-being of current and future generations. We need a deal in Nagoya.”

NORBERT RÖTTGEN, Federal Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety of Germany, said that in the time it would take to deliver his statement, more than half a football field of German land would be converted into transport and settlement areas, while the equivalent of 170 football fields would be deforested globally. More than 900 tons of fish would be taken from the oceans and one more species might vanish from the planet forever. “And we let it happen. We let it happen, even though we value these plants and animals as part of our world, and even though we know that biological diversity is vital to feeding us humans.”

Conserving biological diversity was not a luxury but necessary insurance, an investment in future and lives, he emphasized. Conserving biodiversity worldwide required committed and long-term action and cooperation among the international community. Today, a signal should be sent on the need for a global pact on biodiversity, among other means by recognizing the value of biodiversity for human well-being and for the global economy, and by reducing the ecological footprint and restructuring production, trade and consumption. The financial foundations for tackling those and other challenges at the national and international levels must be significantly strengthened, he said.

SEIJI MAEHARA, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, said that swathes of forest equivalent to one third of his country’s total area were vanishing every year. “If the destruction of the ecosystem continues at this pace, mankind could eternally lose most of nature’s bounty in the near future. We should understand that the loss of biodiversity has been caused by none other than human activities,” he said, adding that new action must be taken to halt the loss.

In October, Japan would host the Tenth Conference of the Parties in Nagoya, with the aim of achieving a global agreement on commencing new actions and setting global targets up to 2020 and 2050. Negotiators would try to reach agreement on a new international regime covering access to and sharing of benefits relating to genetic resources as well as international rules on modified organisms. That could lead to an “epoch-making agreement to facilitate” the flow of funds for habitat conservation.

He said his country had proposed adopting a resolution on the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity during the current session. It would call for the promotion of concerted action over the next 10 years, not only within the framework of the Convention, but also throughout the United Nations system. Japan would also strive for the adoption of a resolution on IPBES during the session. It would provide a scientific basis for policies on biodiversity conservation.

Japan would also propose the “Satoyama Initiative” in Nagoya, with a view to enabling the international sharing of experiences and practices developed in different regions of the world. Japan also intended to propose assistance measures to support developing countries in the formulation and implementation of national strategies, if a global common target was agreed at the Conference of the Parties. “Japan has long valued living in harmony with nature through the ingenious utilization of nature’s abundant gifts in our daily lives and activities,” he said. “As the Earth and humankind are in a crisis caused by the loss of biodiversity, we are urged to address the root cause by making our lifestyles and behaviour more harmonious with nature.”

JOSÉ MANUEL DURÃO BARROSO, President of the European Commission, spoke on behalf of the European Union, warning that the world was standing at a crossroads. Either the international community took concerted action to reverse biodiversity loss as soon as possible, or it compromised its own future and that of future generations. “Nagoya is our chance to turn the situation around. It is our chance to make decisions that will strengthen implementation of the Convention’s three key objectives,” he said. It was important to adopt a new and effective strategic plan that encouraged collective action and enjoyed the support of everyone who benefited from biodiversity or whose activities had an impact on it.

“That plan must be sufficiently ambitious to force all States parties to the Convention to raise their game, to tackle the key drivers of biodiversity loss and to prevent ecological tipping points from being reached,” he said. It was important finally to conclude negotiations on the protocol on access and benefit sharing, which should ensure transparency, legal certainty and predictability for those seeking access to genetic resources, as well as the fair and equitable sharing of benefits derived from them. It was also important to agree on how best to build capacity and mobilize scientific, technological, human and financial resources to enable all parties to implement their commitments under the Convention.

As part of its 2020 biodiversity target, the European Union had committed to bolstering its contribution to averting global biodiversity loss, providing \$1 billion annually from 2002 to 2008, he said. Its members had also made significant contributions recently to replenish the Global Environment Facility, earmarking \$1.2 billion for biodiversity, a 28 per cent increase over the last replenishment. There was a need to reform, eliminate and reorient subsidies harmful to biodiversity, and for funding payments for ecosystem services and other market-based instruments. The European Union was prepared to work with all parties to improve and ensure long-term sustainable support for implementation. However, all parties must share responsibility and ensure that biodiversity objectives were given sufficient priority in Government plans and programmes. He welcomed last June’s decision in the Republic of Korea to create the Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, saying he looked forward to a positive Assembly decision by year’s end to create that Platform in 2011.

Thematic Panel I

Co-chairing the first of two thematic panels on the theme “The way forward in achieving the three objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the internationally agreed biodiversity goals and targets”, were Danilo Türk, President of Slovenia, and Emomali Rahmon, President of Tajikistan.

During the discussion, Heads of States and Government, other high-ranking officials and representatives of civil society warned that continuing degradation of biological diversity, caused mainly by human action, would adversely affect the planet’s ability to regenerate sufficiently to sustain life. “We cannot live without Mother Earth, but the planet can live without us,” one speaker said, pointing out that another planet was not available.

With 22 per cent of mammal species at risk of extinction, coral reefs endangered by global warming and other distressing vital signs, the situation was bleak, speakers stressed, with one noting that human activities had now exceeded the Earth’s regeneration capacity by 40 per cent. Humankind must accept that the planet’s resources were finite, and its biological infrastructure was on the verge of collapse. If that happened, the poor would suffer most, since they depended most heavily on biodiversity. Speakers stressed in that regard that Government measures and policies, in and of themselves, were not enough and that everybody must adjust current unsustainable production and consumption patterns.

There had been a collective failure to meet the Convention’s target of reducing the rate of biodiversity loss, speakers stressed. During next month’s tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in Nagoya, agreement must be reached on a new, achievable and workable post-2010 strategic plan for the further

implementation of the Convention, with clear, measurable and communicable targets for 2020, which should be monitored.

The Nagoya Conference should also adopt a legally binding protocol to the Convention, on access to and sharing of the benefits of the use of biological resources and associated traditional knowledge, numerous speakers said. They called for a resource mobilization strategy that could provide developing countries with adequate resources and technology. It was emphasized that the protocol could also address the issue of “biopiracy”, with countries making use of genetic resources taking measures to protect the rights of the countries of origin.

Also of high importance was the creation of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, intended to fill the communication gap separating science from policymakers. Speakers called on the current session of the General Assembly to adopt a resolution establishing that Platform.

Many speakers stressed the link between declining biodiversity and climate change, noting that the financing of activities to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change should contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Support was expressed in that regard for initiative on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) and forest conservation, sustainable forest management and the enhancement of forest carbon stocks (REDD+) based on active participation by developing countries. Biodiversity, food security and climate change must be tackled together, one speaker said, while others called for greater cohesion between the activities of the Biodiversity Convention, the Convention on Deforestation and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

According to speakers, countering biodiversity loss would also help realize the Millennium Development Goals, strengthen food security and alleviate poverty, since the conservation and sustainable use of biological resources created opportunities for sustainable development. Without biodiversity, there would be no food. Protecting it was not just a matter of protecting birds and plants, but one of combating poverty. In that regard, speakers urged special attention to the African continent, which had huge biological resources and reserves, but lacked the resources to combat the loss of its natural heritage. Some speakers also underlined the importance of protecting the biodiversity of marine environments by establishing protected marine areas and no-take zones.

Some speakers suggested that a price tag should be placed on ecosystem services so they could be integrated into economic policies. Biodiversity issues must be part of mainstream policymaking. Many stressed the need to include civil society and the private sector in the debate on biodiversity, and underscored the importance of education in that regard. Local communities, the poor, indigenous peoples, women and youth should be involved, because “we do not inherit the planet from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children”, according to one speaker.

The Prime Minister of Bangladesh participated in the discussion.

Interventions were made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Plurinational State of Bolivia; the Minister of Environment of Canada; the Minister of Environment, Land and Sea of Italy; the Minister of Environment and Forests of India; the Minister of the Environment of Japan; the Secretary of Environment and Sustainable Development of Argentina; the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs of the United Kingdom; the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources of Mexico; the Minister of Environment of the Republic of Korea; the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Botswana; the Minister of Environment of Sweden; the Minister of Environment and Forestry of Turkey; the Secretary of State for Environment of Portugal; the Minister for Environment, Nature and Culture of Belgium; and the Minister for National Planning and Development of Indonesia.

Further interventions were made by the Minister for the Environment of Denmark; the Secretary of State for Climate Change of Spain; the Minister for Ecology of France; the Minister of Environment of Peru; the Minister for Environment and Forests of Romania; the Minister of the Environment of Brazil (on behalf of the Group of Like-Minded Megadiverse Countries); the Special Envoy for Climate Change of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Venezuela; the Minister of Environment of Chile (on behalf of the Rio Group); the Assistant Secretary for Oceans and International Environment and Scientific Affairs of the United States of America; the Minister for Natural Resources and Environment of Thailand; and the General Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Madagascar.

The Permanent Representative of Morocco spoke on behalf of his country's Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Representatives of the Smallholders Foundation of Nigeria; the H. John Heinz III Center for Science, Economics and the Environment; and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) also addressed the meeting.

Thematic Panel II

María Fernanda Espinosa, Minister of Heritage of Ecuador, and Erik Solheim, Minister of the Environment and International Development of Norway, co-chaired the second thematic panel, as speakers reiterated the many concerns and views expressed during the morning discussion.

Shedding light on the impact of biodiversity loss on small island developing States, speakers pointed out that the livelihoods of rural communities in those countries were under threat, dependent as they were on wild flora and fauna for hunting, fishing, tour guiding and other nature-based activities. Climate change had caused coral bleaching, dried up wetland environments, engendered harsher dry seasons and increased the intensity of hurricanes and tropical storms. It threatened the ability to provide clean water, protect fisheries and sustain tourism.

Moreover, the extinction rates in island States, especially for bird species, were among the highest in the world due to invasive species, the loss of habitat and excessive resource exploitation, the meeting heard. Rising extinction rates were particularly worrying because the Pacific Ocean covered 35 per cent of the earth's surface and was home to more than half the known species of cetaceans and six of the seven known marine turtle species. Many small islands also grappled with the need to balance competing demands to use land for infrastructure, agriculture and housing expansion with the need for biodiversity conservation. That challenge, coupled with the islands' vulnerability to sea level rise as well as capacity and financial resource constraints, thwarted efforts to meet long-term biodiversity targets.

To address those alarming trends, according to speakers, it was necessary to enact programmes promoting national ownership of sustainable development and conservation, and to apply the best modern and traditional science, taking into account local systems of land and marine resource ownership. One speaker called for standardizing definitions to improve the quality and usefulness of biodiversity data so as to inform decision-making, and urged international agencies to help developing countries improve their collection of statistical data and analysis of the impact of biodiversity loss. Another speaker pointed to the importance of cross-border collaboration in managing shared biological resources.

Other speakers said biodiversity loss caused by climate change should be addressed through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and that a second period of commitment should be formed to reduce harmful greenhouse gases and prevent uncontrollable and unpredictable biodiversity loss from threatening humanity's survival. They called for strongly building on the synergies between the Climate Change Convention and the Biodiversity and Desertification Conventions.

Speakers also expressed worries about the key findings of the third *Global Biodiversity Outlook* report, according to which the 2010 biodiversity target of significantly reducing biodiversity loss had not been met, due in part to limited financial, human and technical capacity in the developing world. That situation must change, they stressed. One speaker said that the revised post-2010 strategy was comprehensive and ambitious enough to close existing gaps, but its successful implementation, particularly by developing countries and economies in transition, depended on predictable, timely and increased funding. Moreover, the Global Environmental Facility should explore mechanisms to channel additional funds for implementing the strategic plan, in accordance with targets to be adopted in Nagoya.

The Prime Minister of Samoa participated in the discussion.

Other high-level Government officials making interventions included the Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the Philippines; the Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs of South Africa; the Minister of Housing and the Environment of Trinidad and Tobago; the Minister of Habitat and Environment of Gabon; the Minister for Forestry and the Environment of Gambia; the Vice-President for Legal and Parliamentary Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran; the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Solomon Islands; the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Guyana; the Minister for the Environment of Mozambique; the Commissioner for the Environment of the European Union; the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Guatemala; the Minister for Forest Economy and the Environment of Congo; the Minister for Environment, Water Resources and Drainage of Barbados; and the Minister of State for the Environment of Uganda.

Further interventions were made by the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan; the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment of Poland; the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece; the Vice-Minister in the Federal Office for the Environment of Switzerland; the Vice-Minister for the Environment of Colombia; the Assistant Secretary for the Environment Branch in the International Legal Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia; the Vice-Minister for the Environment and Natural Resources of the Dominican Republic; the Director-General of the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality of the Netherlands; and the Vice-Chair of the National Planning Commission of Nepal.

The Permanent Representatives of New Zealand, Finland, Kenya and Libya also spoke.

Closing Remarks

General Assembly President DEISS (Switzerland) summarized the day's discussions and said the summary would be transmitted to the Tenth Conference of the Parties in Nagoya next month.

Press conference

A press conference took place on the same day as the high-level General Assembly meeting on biodiversity.

The actor Edward Norton, United Nations Goodwill Ambassador for Biodiversity, said the era in which environmental issues were considered separate from issues of human need was over. Biodiversity was an issue that affected all people in their daily lives, he said, calling for engagement on the issue "on an individual level". One of the best ways in which individuals could act was to "vote with their dollars" and make economic choices that would slow the pace of biodiversity loss.

He said he also regretted the failure of the United States to ratify the Convention on Biological Diversity, saying it was "deflating" to note that "countries as chaotic as Iraq and Somalia" had nevertheless acceded to the treaty.

"The vital signs are very disturbing. Basic biological infrastructure is deteriorating very rapidly," said Professor Thomas Lovejoy, Heinz Center Biodiversity Chair at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. Without progress on several fronts, including protection of ecosystems, a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and better management of the planet as a biophysical system, "the poor would suffer the most", he added.

Also at the press conference was Eric Chivian, Founder and Director, Center for Health and the Global Environment, Harvard Medical School, who introduced a report of the Center which he said explored the link between human health and biodiversity. "Human health is not usually part of discussions about biodiversity, and it has to be," Dr. Chivian said. He cited polar bears as an example, saying that their ability to hibernate for long periods without losing bone mass or needing to urinate could provide valuable clues for the treatment of osteoporosis and kidney ailments, respectively. "If we lose polar bears in the wild, we may lose with them the secrets that they hold," he said.

The Executive Secretary said that the next 1,000 years of biodiversity would be decided by the actions of today's generation. "Business as usual is not an option," he said. "Protecting biodiversity is no longer a luxury; it is a necessity, and it is not a cost, but an investment." He, too, regretted that the United States had yet to ratify the Convention, leaving it only with observer status in Nagoya on a par with non-governmental organizations. Such a situation was "not right", he said, adding that "the status of the United States is more than just observing the process".

The press conference concluded with the participants taking turns ringing a "biodiversity bell" representing extinct species and cast from the same Portland stone from England used on the facade of United Nations Headquarters. The bell would be rung every 22 September as a reminder of the day's high-level event, and on every 22 May, the International Day of Biodiversity.
