



CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

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PRESS RELEASE

Governments set rigorous targets for reducing the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010

Talks launched for international regime on access to genetic resources and benefit-sharing

Kuala Lumpur, 20 February 2004 – The 187 member states of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) will conclude a two-week meeting here today after agreeing on a more quantitative approach to reducing the rate of biodiversity loss by the end of the decade.

“The conservation and sustainable use of the world’s biological resources is central to alleviating poverty and promoting sustainable development,” said Klaus Toepfer, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, which provides the Convention’s secretariat.

“By adopting measurable indicators and specific goals for the overall 2010 target, this conference has empowered governments to more accurately monitor progress – or the lack of it – in reversing the modern extinction crisis,” he said.

The 2010 target for significantly reducing the current rate of biodiversity loss was endorsed in 2002 by ministers at the previous CBD conference and by the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg.

The sub-targets agreed here include conserving at least 10% of each type of ecosystem, protecting those areas that have a particular importance for biodiversity, stabilizing populations of certain species now in decline and ensuring that no species of wild flora or fauna are endangered by international trade.

Biodiversity is notoriously difficult to quantify – for example while some 1.75 million species of all kinds have been scientifically described, highly uncertain estimates suggest the real total could be 14 million. Estimates of the global extinction rate for species also vary widely.

Governments are therefore identifying indicators that lend themselves to accurate measurement. Examples include numbers of invasive alien species and the related economic costs, acreage of forests under sustainable management, the degree to which related ecosystems are connected or fragmented, water quality in aquatic ecosystems, and so forth.

The sub-targets will be pursued through the Convention's various work programmes. For example, this week's meeting adopted new work programmes on protected areas and on mountain biological diversity.

Another major accomplishment in Kuala Lumpur has been the launching of new talks on how to craft an international regime on access to genetic resources and benefit-sharing.

The issue of gaining access to genetic resources and sharing the resulting benefits is highly complex, and important principles and potentially large sums of money are at stake.

The idea is that by granting an international company or other organization access to its genetic resources (such as plants that can be used to produce new pharmaceuticals or fragrances), a country or local community will in return receive a fair share of the profits or other benefits.

Furthermore, "an effective international regime on access and benefit-sharing would need to protect the interests of indigenous and local communities, commercial firms, consumers and all other key stakeholders," said Hamdallah Zedan, Executive Secretary of the Convention.

"By giving biodiversity-rich countries a greater stake in protecting their valuable biological resources, this future regime could make an enormous contribution to the goals of the Convention on Biological Diversity," he said.

Voluntary guidelines on biodiversity and tourism development are also being adopted here. Environmentally sustainable tourism can generate jobs and revenues, thus providing an incentive for preserving natural areas. Still other conference decisions relate to technology transfer, traditional knowledge and funding.

The Seventh Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 7) to the Convention on Biological Diversity was attended by some 2,000 participants, including 80 ministers. COP 8 will be held in Brazil in 2006. The first meeting of the Parties to the Convention's Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety will take place in Kuala Lumpur next week.

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