



Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

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Biodiversity and Climate Change

VISIT OF HIGH LEVEL DELEGATION OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE SECRETARIAT OF THE CBD

Montreal – 22 June 2007

A High level delegation of British government officials visited the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) on 21 and 22 June 2007. The delegation from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) comprised Mr. Martin Brasher, Deputy Director, Wildlife Habitats and Biodiversity and Ms. Glenys Parry, CBD National Focal Point. Mr. Brasher said the reason for the mission was to “mutually reinforce the partnership between DEFRA and the CBD in an informal setting with room for frank dialogue.” The visit offered an opportunity for the officials to brief the staff of the CBD on the latest developments regarding the implementation of the three objectives of the Convention in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK).

Mr. Brasher noted that the importance the UK government places on biodiversity is reflected in the incorporation of the word ‘biodiversity’ into a DEFRA ministerial title. Biodiversity is seen as a vital national resource of the UK, with countless benefits to UK citizens. It is also seen as something that is good for business. For example, areas with healthy biodiversity attract recreational visitors and tourists and support environment related economic activity, which in turn contribute to job creation. There is also strong public interest in biodiversity issues in the UK, reflected in the high membership and significant achievements of non-governmental organizations and strong media coverage.

Ahmed Djoghlaif, Executive Secretary of the Convention said, “Cooperation with the UK is testimony of the role played by the government in promoting multilateral cooperation for the conservation and protection of biodiversity.”

In presenting the UK’s implementation of the Convention, Ms. Parry gave an overview of the UK’s rich biological diversity. This includes humid forest with spectacular assemblages and great diversity of mosses, lichens and ferns; Caledonian forest; bluebell woods, rare outside UK; lowland heaths among the most important in Europe owing to decline elsewhere; chalk grasslands rich in orchids, other rare plants and butterflies; and a wide variety of coastal habitats including dune systems, salt marshes and mudflats that support over-wintering wading birds. She noted that Britain has seabird populations of international importance, including 60% of the global population of gannets and 90% of the global population of Manx Shearwaters. The UK also accounts for 40% of the world population of grey seals and is home to 38 species of cetaceans and a diversity of cold water corals, discovered only relatively recently.

The UK is in the process of reviewing its Biodiversity Action Plan which in 1994 comprised 391 species action plans, 45 habitat action plans and 161 local biodiversity

action plans. Today there are 1163 priority species and 67 priority habitats. Biodiversity strategies for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales contribute to a more strategic approach to conservation in the UK. The UK Biodiversity Action Plan not only covers species and habitat but also internationally protected areas, public awareness and global biodiversity.

On the international level, among the UK's largest global initiatives on biodiversity, is the Darwin Initiative. Announced at the Rio Summit in 1992, the Darwin Initiative aims to assist countries rich in biodiversity but poor in financial resources to implement the CBD through funding of collaborative projects that draw on UK expertise. Over £60 million has been committed to date with 464 projects set up in over 100 countries.

The visit also coincided with the launch in London of China's National Strategy for Plant Conservation to protect over 30,000 species of higher plant in China, accounting for 10% of the total higher plant species in the world – with over half the number endemic to China. On the launching of China's National Strategy for Plant Conservation in London, the Honourable Barry Gardiner, British Minister for Biodiversity, Landscape and Rural Affairs said, "no single country or organization can address the challenges of sustainable development alone."

Ahmed Djoghlaif stated that: "addressing the unprecedented challenges of the enhanced phase of implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity in order to achieve sustainable development calls for enhanced partnership between Parties and the Secretariat through open and permanent channels of communication and dialogue". He added that regular visits by government representatives to the Secretariat is of strategic importance to better understand and support the needs of Parties and the hope that such visits will become an established tradition in the operations of the Secretariat.