

## PRESS RELEASE

### **Celebrating the 150th anniversary of *On the Origin of Species* and the launch of the UK partnership supporting Biodiversity is Life - the International Year of Biodiversity 2010**

Montreal, 1 December 2009 – On 24 November, Darwin200 partners—the British Council, the John R. Murray Charitable Trust and the Charles Darwin Trust—hosted the celebrations commemorating the 150th anniversary of the publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of the Species*. The key theme of this event, held in the historic rooms at 50 Albemarle Street in London, from which it was first published on 24 November 1859, focused on how Darwin understood that he was seeking not the origin of species, but the nature of biological diversity. It was his work that set the research trajectory leading to our present-day understanding of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

The Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Ahmed Djoghlaif, one of the distinguished guests at the event, said: “Darwin remarked that ‘it is an intolerable thought that [humans] and all other sentient beings are doomed to complete annihilation’. The unprecedented loss of biodiversity compounded by climate change will soon make into an intolerable reality the intolerable thought of the man that we are gathered here today to celebrate, 150 years after the publication of *On the Origin of Species*. Today, the rate of species extinction may be 1,000 times higher than the natural background rate. Two thirds of all ecosystems reviewed by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment are in an advanced state of degradation. Climate change is emerging as one of the most significant drivers of biodiversity loss.”

The historic event organized by Darwin200 and Biodiversity is Life – IYB-UK will take the year-long activities in celebration of the work of Charles Darwin in the United Kingdom from the origin of species to the future of species – the launch of a partnership to support the International Year of Biodiversity 2010.

On 25 November, the UK partnership supporting Biodiversity is Life - the International Year of Biodiversity 2010 was launched at the Natural History Museum with over 300 participants in attendance.

Huw Irranca-Davies, United Kingdom Minister for Marine and Natural Environment, said: “Having vibrant ecosystems are essential to our own health, our economy and our lives. Our challenge is to get the word out there on how important all of this is to everyone. People need to know what biodiversity means for them. “Biodiversity is Life’ gives us a real opportunity to leave a legacy of a greater public understanding of the intrinsic importance of our natural world. This partnership will include many organisations who focus on biodiversity as a part of their core business. But it will also include other organisations keen to spread the word because they see the importance of preserving our natural heritage for future generations.”

“It was I think a great boost to the UK partnership that the CBD Executive Secretary was personally present and endorsed our attempts to make the year a success in the UK. I hope we will have more opportunities to collaborate as the year progresses,” said Dr. Robert Bloomfield, Coordinator of IYB-UK.

Ahmed Djoghlaif said: “The launching today, here in the newly created Darwin Centre, of the UK-IYB partnership comprising 300 partners is the best homage that we can offer on the occasion of the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the publication of *On the Origin of Species* and the best contribution to celebrating life and celebrating biodiversity.”

### **The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**

Opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the Convention on Biological Diversity is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the equitable sharing of the benefits from utilization of genetic resources. With 192 Parties, the CBD has near-universal participation among countries committed to preserving life on Earth. The CBD seeks to address all threats to biodiversity and ecosystem services, including threats from climate change, through scientific assessments, the development of tools, incentives and processes, the transfer of technologies and good practices and the full and active involvement of relevant stakeholders including indigenous and local communities, youth, NGOs, women and the business community. The headquarters of the Secretariat of the Convention are located in Montreal.

For additional information, please contact Marie Aminata Khan on +1 514 287 8701 or at [marie.khan@cbd.int](mailto:marie.khan@cbd.int) or Johan Hedlund on + 1 514 287-6670 or at [johan.hedlund@cbd.int](mailto:johan.hedlund@cbd.int)

For more information on IYB-UK the UK partnership supporting the International Year of Biodiversity 2010, please visit [www.biodiversityislife.net](http://www.biodiversityislife.net)