



PRESS RELEASE

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon officially launch the International Year of Biodiversity

Montreal, 12 January 2010 – Launching the International Year of Biodiversity in Berlin yesterday, German Chancellor Angela Merkel urged the world to take the necessary steps to protect the biological diversity of the Earth.

“The conservation of biological diversity has the same dimension as climate protection. We need a trend reversal - not at some point in the future, but immediately”, said German Federal Chancellor Merkel, speaking on behalf of the current Presidency of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, in addressing more than 400 participants from the diplomatic corps, government, civil society, international organizations, scientists, business, and media at the celebration held in the Museum of Natural History in Berlin, Germany.

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 2010 the International Year of Biodiversity to coincide with the deadline adopted by Governments in 2002 to achieve a significant reduction in the rate of loss of the diversity of species and ecosystems of the planet. According to scientists, the rate of loss due to human activities is as much as 1,000 times higher than the background rate.

During the year, people will celebrate the diversity of life on the planet, and its contribution to human well-being, while working to take the steps needed to combat its loss. At the ceremony in Berlin, political leaders urged the issue of biodiversity protection to be elevated to a level with other issues such as climate change and economic development.

“Worldwide, political decision-makers are increasingly recognizing that biodiversity protection is immensely important for human well-being, global economic development and combating poverty. The time has now come to ensure that these insights are followed by deeds”, Federal Environment Minister Norbert Röttgen stated.

These sentiments were echoed by Abdul Rahman Fadhl AlIryani, the Environment Minister of Yemen, the current President of the Group of 77 and China, representing 132 countries, who said that, “Preserving the rich biodiversity of Yemen and the Arabian Peninsula, in all of its beauty is a priority for us and should be a priority for all.”

Ahmed Djoghlaif, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the body responsible for organizing the United Nations International Year, underlined the importance of biodiversity as a global issue, stating that: “Climate change is indeed a problem, and biological diversity is part of the solution and is therefore a full component of the multilateral political ecology. This is what the International Year of Biodiversity is all about; this is why we are here today in Berlin.”

In a video message to participants, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stressed that “Business as usual is not an option,” and that new targets and a new vision is needed.



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The urgency of the task at hand was echoed by Achim Steiner, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme. “The urgency of the situation demands that as a global community we not only reverse the rate of loss, but that we stop the loss altogether and begin restoring the ecological infrastructure that has been damaged and degraded over the previous century or so.”

During the year, scientists will report on the status and trends of biodiversity loss. The third CBD assessment report, the Global Biodiversity Outlook, will be published in May, providing the latest data on status and trends, as well as policy recommendations on the best ways for Governments to press forward with the post-2010 biodiversity targets.

These recommendations will contribute to the global discussions of a new strategic plan for combating biodiversity loss, and a new set of targets to be adopted by the global community at the Nagoya Biodiversity Summit in Japan in October.

“The International Year of Biodiversity is a critical year because we can all share a common idea that we need to reverse biodiversity loss and restore biodiversity. This will lead us to concrete actions,” said Issei Tajima, Senior Vice-Minister of the Environment for Japan, the incoming President of the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to be held in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, from 18-29 October 2010. “In such a remarkable year, Japan will host the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. I express our determination to make that meeting a success.”

The launch of the year, under the slogan “Biodiversity is Life, Biodiversity is Our Life,” is just the first in a series of global events and celebrations that include the observance of the International Day for Biological Diversity on 22 May under the theme *Biodiversity for Development and Poverty Alleviation*, a special high-level meeting of the General Assembly of the United Nations on biodiversity in September, and others.

“It becomes crystal clear that the problems of our planet are highly interlinked - without combating climate change we will fail to stop the loss of biodiversity, without protecting ecosystems with their carbon storing capacity it will be extremely difficult to meet climate change targets. And without both of them we will fail in our efforts to fight hunger in the world,” said Jochen Flasbarth, President of the German Federal Environment Agency.

Brazil, Thailand, India, and other countries also held launching events in the first week of January. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is organizing a high-level event for the year on 21-22 January in Paris, with the participation of Heads of State and Government and a scientific conference to follow. A Facebook page to celebrate the year, recently created, has gathered thousands of fans who are expressing their hopes for the year.

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 193 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: David Ainsworth on +1 514 833 0196 or at david.ainsworth@cbd.int; Johan Hedlund on + 1 514 287 6670 or at johan.hedlund@cbd.int

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