

PRESS RELEASE

UNESCO/Convention on Biological Diversity Press Release

Preserving Biodiversity: A Vital Challenge

Paris, 22 January - Halting the unprecedented erosion of biodiversity and raising awareness of the need to change our behaviour are urgent priorities. This was the unanimous conclusion of participants at the high-level event organized at United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) headquarters on 21 and 22 January.

The Director General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, declared in a video message at the opening of the meeting that, "We must not be discouraged by the outcomes" of the UN Climate Change Conference last December in Copenhagen. Instead, she said, evoking the destruction of natural habitats and accelerated biodiversity loss, "We must change current trends. The future we choose for our planet is in our hands."

Davidson Hepburn, Chairperson of the UNESCO General Conference, stressed that, "We are witnessing the loss of the very services on which livelihood systems depend", in the case of many populations, particularly those of small island states. "Societies should strive for a more sustainable use of natural resources and for a reduction in habitat loss and climate change, including the social and cultural dimensions. This will allow us to preserve the services on which we depend – the services of biodiversity."

Participants at today's event, which was sponsored by UNESCO with the support of the French National Museum of Natural History, included Ahmed Djoghlaif, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD); Jochen Flasbarth, President of the Bureau of the Conference of the Parties (COP 9) to the Convention on Biological Diversity; Monique Barbut, Chief Executive Officer and Chairperson of the Global Biodiversity Facility (GEF); and Angela Cropper, Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

During the meeting, Ahmed Djoghlaif noted that the world had "failed to fulfil the target adopted by the 110 Heads of State and Government to substantially reduce the rate of loss of biodiversity by 2010" and warned that biodiversity was being lost at an "unprecedented rate". He pointed out that the more than 100 national reports submitted by Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity confirmed that we continue to lose biodiversity at an "unprecedented rate".

"This is not to say that there have not been some partial or regional successes," he said. "We need to identify these important successes and build upon them as we prepare the next strategic plan of the CBD."

These successes will be detailed in the *Global Biodiversity Outlook 3*, to be published by the CBD in May. They include a slowing of Brazilian Amazonian deforestation by 74%, a reduction of 45% in the annual rate of mangrove losses, and a 26% increase in the proportion of Important Bird Areas. Over 12% of terrestrial areas are now under some form of protection.

The report will identify pathways towards even more optimistic outcomes that, with the help of urgent and concerted action, could avoid the most dangerous consequences of biodiversity loss.

Led by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in partnership with UNESCO, the International Year aims primarily to raise awareness on the need to protect life on Earth and to bridge the gap between science and policy makers on this issue. During the International Year of Biodiversity, national governments will seek to reach agreement on a new biodiversity target, to be decided at the Nagoya biodiversity summit in October.

The next event on the calendar for the Year is a week-long scientific conference on biodiversity, which will take place at UNESCO from 25-29 January, the content of which will provide input to the policy process during the IYB

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.

About UNESCO

UNESCO is the only United Nations specialized agency with a specific mandate to promote science. Today, the Natural Sciences Sector implements major international programmes in the freshwater, marine, ecological, earth and basic sciences, while at the same time promoting national and regional science and technology policies and capacity building in the sciences, engineering and renewable energy. Emphasis is given to developing countries, in particular to Africa and to natural disaster prevention. Programmes are designed to respond to the international goals and challenges of climate change, gender equality, the eradication of poverty and sustainable development, in particular in small island developing States.

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