

PRESS RELEASE

A Table from the Sea's Edge

Artwork in celebration of the International Year of Biodiversity

Montreal, 11 November 2010 – During the historic United Nations summit on biodiversity recently concluded in Nagoya, Japan, an object that gained great attention from conference delegates was a large table and chairs crafted from driftwood. Created by British furniture-maker and artist Silas Birtwistle, the striking artwork was exhibited in the courtyard of the conference centre throughout the United Nations meeting, where it was unveiled to the public for the first time. The project is supported by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), WWF, who supported its creation and facilitated its deployment at the conference, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the shipping line Maersk. Numerous other organizations also contributed in various ways.

Birtwistle conceived and created the work as a contribution to the 2010 International Year of Biodiversity. The idea was to help raise public awareness of interlinked environmental issues and promote conservation of the world's coastal and marine biodiversity. The sea shore represents the boundary between marine and terrestrial environments. Ocean currents connect continents and cultures. The table symbolizes the interface between land and sea, connections between human land-based activities and the coastal and marine environment, the links between cultures, and the need for dialogue and agreement between countries to ensure the protection of biodiversity.

In 2009 and 2010, Birtwistle visited beaches in four continents and lining three oceans, in Belize, Canada, Malaysia, and the United Republic of Tanzania, to collect the driftwood. The WWF offices and the coastal communities working with WWF at the sites in East Africa and the Coral Triangle, Malaysia, helped in the collection.

Maersk Line carried the driftwood from ports near each of the collection sites back to the United Kingdom, where Birtwistle crafted the table and twelve unique chairs in a workshop close to his home in London. Maersk shipped the finished artwork to the port of Nagoya and from there will carry it back to the United Kingdom and to other sites around the world for exhibition and use during 2011.

FSC will be using the artwork as a centerpiece of its communications during the 2011 International Year of Forests and aim to take it to a number of cities around the world. The plan is to eventually auction the table so that proceeds can go back to the communities that helped gather the driftwood and support them in their conservation efforts.

At the Nagoya summit, Ahmed Djoghlaif, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, used the table to conclude a number of important agreements with organizations aimed to support implementation of the new strategic plan for biodiversity agreed at the conference by the 193 Parties to the Convention. These included agreements signed with the chief executives of the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies, RARE Conservation, the Sedna Foundation, Earth Rangers, and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.

Among high-level guests at the table was His Highness Prince Bandar Bin Saud Bin Mohammad Al-Saud of Saudi Arabia and Ms. Karen Ellemann, Minister of Environment of Denmark, who spoke with the Executive Secretary about a forthcoming CBD project to promote public awareness of biodiversity.

The actor and Vice-Chair of the Board of Conservation International, Harrison Ford, and the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Achim Steiner, were also hosted at the table and other guests included the youth participants of the IUCN Go4Biodiv initiative and the IUCN project team who collected messages from delegates on origami figures that were pinned to a biodiversity wall, laid out on the table.

During the conference, Mr. Djoghlaif, Birtwistle and Guenter Mitlacher, the WWF focal point for the Convention on Biological Diversity, explained the idea and the story behind the driftwood table to the interested Japanese media, who broadcast a feature on it on prime-time news.

Speaking of the project and artwork, Ahmed Djoghlaif said, “I would like to thank WWF, FSC and Maersk Line for supporting this unique project and I invite others to make use of the table and enable its exhibition during 2011, the International Year of Forests. But most of all I want to thank and to congratulate Silas Birtwistle. Among all those who have contributed to the celebration of the 2010 International Year of Biodiversity, I know of no one who has dedicated such personal effort. Others have worked on behalf of their organizations, but Silas has conceived and carried this as a private individual concerned about the environmental legacy we are leaving our children. The artwork and its presence in Nagoya is testimony to his personal commitment, sacrifice and determination and I find that immensely inspiring.”

The next port of call for the Table from the Sea’s Edge will be Liverpool in the United Kingdom, where it will be exhibited at the city’s World Museum. Plans are also under way for its exhibition and use at other international gatherings early in the New Year, including the 2011 annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos-Klosters, Switzerland. And so as a result of that determination—and inspiration—pieces of driftwood washed up on the shores of distant oceans will continue their global voyage with their story and the message that biodiversity is life, biodiversity is our life.

Notes for Editors:

Information on the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity

- The tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity was held from 18 to 29 October 2010 at the Nagoya Conference Centre, in Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture, Japan. See www.cbd.int/cop10 for more information.
- Recorded webcasts of the proceedings of the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties can be accessed at: <http://webcast.cop10.go.jp/>

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

Opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and entering into force in December 1993, the Convention on Biological Diversity is an international treaty for the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of the components of biodiversity and the equitable sharing of the benefits derived from the use of genetic resources. With 193 Parties, the Convention has near universal participation among countries. The Convention 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 Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, a supplementary treaty to the Convention, seeks to protect biological diversity from the potential risks posed by living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology. To date, 159 countries and the European Union have ratified the Protocol. The Secretariat of the Convention and its Cartagena Protocol is located in Montreal.

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For more information on the Table from the Sea's Edge: <http://www.atablefromtheseasedge.com>

For more information on WWF: <http://wwf.panda.org> (International); http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/where_we_work/east_african_coast/ (Coastal East Africa); <http://wwf.panda.org/coraltriangle/> (Coral Triangle)

For more information on the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC): <http://www.fsc.org>

For more information on Maersk Line: <http://www.maerskline.com>
