



COMMUNIQUÉ

UN decades on biodiversity and desertification launched in Addis Ababa

Addis Ababa/Montreal, 27 July 2011 – The United Nations system joined together at the offices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa on 22 July 2011 for the regional launch for Africa of the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity (UNDB) and to mark the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (UNDDD), two initiatives that have taken on even greater significance in the light of the devastating drought and famine that have recently struck the Horn of Africa and which is affecting an estimated 13 million people.

More than 200 ambassadors, diplomats, UN agencies and other international organizations and dignitaries from the host countries, gathered to celebrate biodiversity and join efforts to halt land degradation. Their presence demonstrated the synergy that exists between the biodiversity and the land-degradation agendas, and the opportunities to simultaneously tackle both environmental challenges.

The President of Ethiopia, Girma Wolde-Giorgis, said in a statement to the meeting, "This year, the United Nations Decade begins. The Decade is our opportunity to integrate policies and practices into all aspects of our lives that can guarantee the conservation and sustainable use of the biodiversity of Africa, while ensuring that the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources are shared in a fair and equitable manner."

The Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, Abdoulie Janneh, said in a statement: "The concurrent regional launch of the UNDB and observance of the UNDDD is indeed apt. It signifies the inextricable link between biodiversity conservation and the fight against land degradation and desertification. This event therefore sends a strong signal to all stakeholders on the need for synergistic implementation of policies and programmes in this regard. I therefore wish to extend and congratulate the two Executive Secretaries for a laudable initiative."

Ahmed Djoghlaf, CBD Executive Secretary said: "By elevating last February biodiversity as a priority in all of the African Commission activities and programmes, the African Heads of State and Government have led by example. Today the United Nations Economic Commission and its partners are also leading by example. Today's unique event bringing together the United Nations family, the African Union, the two Rio Conventions, the host country and Japan as President of COP 10, is a clear message that more than ever before a global alliance for protecting life on earth is the sole response to meeting the unprecedented loss of biodiversity, including in dryland ecosystems."

Luc Gnacadja, the Executive Secretary to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification said: "Our message is a call for mainstreaming at country level in all aspects of planning. We also urge synergy in action for effective implementation of these Conventions in Africa. In implementing the Rio conventions, let us advance at country and local levels by operating through integrated approaches. Synergy will generate economies of scale for our investments and generate multiple co-benefits and positive impacts, especially for the poor and the vulnerable."

At its sixty-fifth session, the United Nations General Assembly declared the period 2011-2020 to be “the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity, with a view to contributing to the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity for the Period 2011-2020” (resolution 65/161). The UNDB aims to support and promote implementation of the objectives of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, with the goal of mainstreaming biodiversity at various levels. Throughout the UNDB governments are encouraged to develop, implement and communicate the results of national strategies for implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity.

With more lands around the world facing increasing deterioration and degradation, the General Assembly declared the UN Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification, which runs from January 2010 to December 2020, to promote action aimed at protecting drylands. The Decade is an opportunity to make critical changes to secure the long-term ability of drylands to provide value for human well-being. Its goals and objectives flow directly from General Assembly's resolution 64/201. The motivation for this resolution was the international community's concern about the deteriorating situation of desertification in all regions, which has far reaching implications for the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, particularly the eradication of poverty and ensuring environmental sustainability.

In October 2011, Costa Rica will host the regional launch of the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity for the Central America region. As the initiator of the initiative, and the country holding the Presidency of the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Japan, in partnership with the United Nations University, will host an event to launch the Decade at the international level in December 2011.
