

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
22 May 2005

The theme of this year's International Day for Biological Diversity, "Biodiversity: Life Insurance for our Changing World", reminds us of the central role of biodiversity in underpinning sustainable development, and in protecting society from the consequences of unexpected shocks such as water shortages, the emergence of infectious diseases, extreme weather events and the genetic vulnerability of crops and livestock.

In recent decades, economic development and technological advancement have helped to improve living conditions for many of the world's people, and to lift some of the poorest members of the human family from absolute poverty. Yet over that same period, unsustainable patterns of production and consumption have reduced the biological diversity of life on our planet more than at any other time in history, threatening the capacity of ecosystems to sustain the economic advances humankind has struggled to achieve.

According to the synthesis report of the recently released Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, virtually all ecosystems on the planet have been transformed by human activities. For example:

- 25 per cent of commercially exploited marine fish stocks are over-harvested, leading to the closure of many fisheries with significant socio-economic consequences;
- Changes in land cover, in particular tropical deforestation and desertification, tend to reduce local rainfall and contribute to desertification and water shortages;
- The capacity of ecosystems to mitigate the effects of extreme weather events such as the recent tsunami in the Indian Ocean has been reduced as a result of the conversion of wetlands, forests and mangroves.

The report of the Millennium Project issued in January offers a number of practical proposals for reaching the internationally agreed goal of significantly reducing the rate of biodiversity loss by the year 2010. Market mechanisms, policy reforms, improved regulations and investments in the management of critical ecosystems must be part of the picture; these can also foster progress towards other Millennium Development Goals. It is therefore of utmost importance that Governments implement the Convention on Biological Diversity and provide additional financial and other resources for that purpose.

Biodiversity provides the materials we need for food, clothing and shelter. It helps to ensure health, and contributes to human well-being in many other ways. Halting its degradation and loss, and ensuring the equitable use of genetic resources, will require a host of new and stronger actions at all levels. The September Summit of the General Assembly offers another

critical opportunity for Heads of State and Government to put in place the political and financial commitments to conserve and sustainably use the foundation for life itself. But let us all reaffirm that commitments today, on this International Day for Biological Diversity.