

Mr. President,
Executive Secretary
Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour for me to have this opportunity to address this fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification. Given the close links between our two conventions and the potential for synergies in their implementation, I would like to use the time available to give a brief overview of developments in the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity of relevance to the Convention to Combat Desertification and to indicate some possible directions for future work.

There is no doubt about the mutual relevance of the two conventions. Dry and sub-humid lands, probably more than any other biome, exemplify the interdependence of human society and the biological diversity of the natural environment. As fragile ecosystems, these areas are highly vulnerable to both natural and anthropogenic disturbances. And the people and communities living within dry and sub-humid lands are equally vulnerable to these changes. The loss of biodiversity is both a cause and an effect of the socio-economic conditions of the populations concerned. It is also both a cause and an effect of desertification. Accordingly, the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in these areas will contribute greatly to the achievement of the objectives of the two conventions, the raising of the living standards of local people, and alleviation of poverty, dislocation and suffering in the affected areas. Equally, action to prevent, control and reverse desertification will in itself help stem the loss of biological diversity and the vicious cycle of human misery and natural-resource depletion that results.

It is therefore gratifying to be able to report that the period since your last meeting has been one of fruitful cooperation between our two conventions. The details of this cooperation are well reflected in the document prepared by the Secretariat of the Convention to Combat Desertification that has been circulated under the symbol ICCD/COP(4)/6. Of particular note is, of course, the adoption by the Conference of the Parties of a programme of work on the biodiversity of dry and sub-humid lands. This programme was drafted in close collaboration with the Secretariat of the Convention to Combat Desertification, and the role of this Convention will be equally critical to its implementation.

Central also to the implementation of the programme of work will be the use of the ecosystem approach. This approach – already designated the main framework for action under the Convention on Biological Diversity – was further elaborated upon at the last meeting of the Conference of the Parties, which succeeded in formulating a clear set of principles and operational guidance on the subject. Given its emphasis on public participation and the decentralization of ecosystem management, the ecosystem approach is eminently suited to the type of local-level activities required under both the programme of work and the Convention to Combat Desertification. The programme is also to build on the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities and, in that respect, we are most interested in the outcome of the work on traditional knowledge being undertaken under this Convention.

It is also noteworthy that, in its guidance to the Global Environment Facility, as the institutional structure operating the financial mechanism of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Conference of the Parties decided that GEF should provide support, as a priority, for projects that implemented the programme of work on dry and sub-humid lands, through the development, review and implementation of its operational programmes, in particular the operational programme on arid and semi-arid ecosystems.

In adopting the programme, the Conference of the Parties called specifically for collaboration with the Secretariat of the Convention to Combat Desertification, including through the development of a joint work programme. Possible elements for this joint programme had been circulated at the meeting and met with general approval.

These elements mirror the format and content of the programme of work adopted by the Conference of the Parties and are grouped under three headings:

- Assessments;
- Targeted actions; and
- Joint reporting.

As a first step regarding assessments, the two secretariats intend to collaborate in assessing the status and trends of biodiversity in dry and sub-humid lands and the effectiveness of conservation measures. The aim is to arrive at a better understanding of biological diversity in dry and sub-humid lands, as well as their dynamics, their socio-economic value and the consequences of biodiversity loss. We also intend to work together in developing assessment tools, with the assistance of a liaison group of experts drawn from the rosters of experts maintained under the conventions. The expected outputs from this activity are twofold:

- First, criteria to facilitate the identification of lands of particular value or under threat; and
- Second, indicators of the status and trends of the biological diversity of dry and sub-humid lands.

The joint work programme might also include a number of specific elements related to the targeted actions agreed by the Conference of the Parties. These include:

- The promotion of concerted action by facilitating consultation, coordination and information-sharing within countries;
- The promotion of regional and international networks;
- Encouraging and supporting the development of policies that promote participatory decision-making and the diversification of means of production in support of local livelihoods; and
- Information exchange.

With regard to joint reporting, our two secretariats intend to work closely to identify harmonized formats for reporting in line with our respective obligations. These efforts will be part of the more general work towards the simplification of reporting procedures and reducing the reporting burden of Parties to the various biodiversity-

related conventions. One step already taken in this direction is the decision by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity to give Parties and other bodies the option of reporting on the implementation of the programme of work on dry and sub-humid lands through reports made in the context of the Convention to Combat Desertification and other relevant conventions.

The two secretariats are currently in contact to try to operationalize the joint work programme in line with the basic outline reviewed by our Conference of the Parties. One importance element of these efforts will be to involve other institutions and actors, particularly in field implementation. We are also working together to develop a roster of experts on the biodiversity of dry and sub-humid lands, and I would take this opportunity to call for the submission of nominations of experts for inclusion in this roster. Another area on which the Secretariat has been requested to focus by the Conference of the Parties is the dissemination of information on the biological diversity of dry and sub-humid lands. One of the means of making this information available will be the development of a database on dry and sub-humid lands in our clearing-house mechanism. I look forward to reporting to you at subsequent meetings on this and other relevant activities.

The Conference of the Parties also decided to establish an ad hoc technical group of experts to consolidate and assess the status and trends of the biodiversity of dry and sub-humid lands and to assess the progress and the effects of specific measures undertaken for conservation and sustainable use of dryland biodiversity, as well as international priorities at the regional and global levels. The group will also be responsible for making proposals for expected outcomes of such priorities, further activities, possible actors that might implement them and timetables for action. The first meeting of the group is tentatively scheduled for February 2002, after SBSTTA reviews the progress made in the programme of work and before the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention. Again, as in all aspects of the implementation and follow-up to our work on dry and sub-humid lands, the input from the bodies and processes established under this Convention will be essential.

The Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity looks forward to this continuing cooperation and to the results that I am confident will be achieved if we succeed in mobilizing the available energy and expertise to maximize the potential for collaboration between the two conventions in addressing the problems of biodiversity loss and desertification and the human suffering that results.

I thank you for your attention.