



**CONVENTION ON
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

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STATEMENT BY

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CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

TO

**THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE SIXTH MEETING OF THE
CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL
DIVERSITY**

7 April 2002

The Hague, The Netherlands

Mr. Minister,
Madam President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentleman,

May I first congratulate you, Madam President, on your election and express my appreciation to the outgoing President for his support to the Convention process.

It is fitting that this important meeting should take place in The Hague, the seat of the Government of the Netherlands and of a number of important United Nations bodies. The Government and the people of the Netherlands have made a remarkable contribution to the world over the years. They have shown that a relatively small nation can make a difference. They have been in the forefront of the movement to protect the environment and to promote environmental awareness throughout the world. And they are once again demonstrating their commitment to the objective of sustainable development and to the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

I also would like to express my deep gratitude to those countries who have contributed funds to support the participation of delegates from developing countries and countries with economies in transition, namely, Australia, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, New Zealand, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

The level of participation at this meeting is further testimony to the growing commitment to the objectives of the Convention and the recognition of the central importance of the issues it addresses. The attendance here in The Hague has set new records, with some 2,000 participants from 170 Governments and 365 organizations. We also expect almost one hundred ministers to participate in the ministerial roundtable to be held next week.

These numbers are impressive and are evidence of a profound change in attitudes since the Convention was adopted in 1992. The conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity are no longer seen as somewhat of a luxury but as a fundamental underpinning of economic growth, poverty alleviation and sustainable development.

Biological diversity worldwide generates a wide array of goods and services on which the world's national economies are based. The world's different ecosystems, species and genetic resources provide us with an assortment of goods and services, from the food we eat, the water we drink, the air we breathe, the medicines we use to fight diseases, and the fibre we use for clothing. As such, human life itself depends on the continuing capacity of the ecosystems to provide their multitude of benefits.

The loss of biological diversity is also intimately linked to economic conditions and problems of social injustice. If biological resources are misused or over consumed, people suffer, economies decline and poverty spreads. Speaking at the London School of Economics and Political Science last February on how to achieve and sustain

development in the twenty-first century, the Secretary-General of the United Nations identified the depletion of natural resources as one of the major impediments to sustainable development. He said, and I quote:

“I do not need to describe for you the multiple hardships to which so many of our fellow human beings are subjected, each of which makes it harder to escape from the others: poverty, hunger, diseases, oppression, conflict, pollution and depletion of natural resources. Development means enabling people to escape from that vicious circle”. End of quotation.

Over the relatively brief time in which it has been in force, much has been achieved under the Convention, although much more needs to be done. Among the most notable achievements:

- More than one hundred countries have adopted a national biodiversity strategy and action plan;
- The Parties succeeded in adopting the landmark Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety;
- The Convention has proven to be an effective tool for policy development through the elaboration of work programmes on thematic and cross-cutting issues;
- Inter-agency cooperation has been raised to an unprecedented level;
- Substantial financial resources for projects in developing countries have been mobilized through the Convention’s financial mechanism;
- Progress has been made on achieving the objective of a fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources, through the elaboration of draft guidelines;
- The Convention process has provided a forum for indigenous and local communities to be heard and their concerns addressed.

Nevertheless, biodiversity continues to be lost. Most of the challenges faced in stemming that loss come from powerful external forces: inappropriate government policies related to trade, agriculture and incentives; lack of intersectoral coordination and cooperation; poorly articulated role for biodiversity in defining national and international development and in poverty alleviation; lack of effective and consistent partnership; piecemeal fragmented decision-making with many overlaps and gaps; and the failure of national governments to coordinate their positions and actions at the national level which also mirrors at the international level.

While awareness of these issues has led to increased efforts to halt biodiversity loss, the task is made difficult by institutional weaknesses and the lack of effective governance at the national and international levels.

I hope that this meeting will provide an opportunity for reflection on the achievements of the Convention and on ways that together we can make it function more effectively. One of the key tasks is moving from policy development to action on the ground. Eight years

following the entry into force of the Convention are enough for information gathering, priority setting and policy development. Before asking for new policy developments with new programmes of work, it is worthwhile to strengthen compliance with and effectiveness of existing programmes. The Convention should move now to the implementation of agreed policies and work programmes.

To do so, will need not only political will but also a greater transfer of financial resources and technologies to the developing countries and countries with economies in transition. The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities is built into the Convention, and it is neither equitable nor practical for the poor to bear the main brunt of its implementation.

Madam President,

The issues for in-depth discussion at this meeting are among the most crucial on the international biodiversity agenda.

- First, access and benefit sharing, where you will take up the draft Bonn Guidelines, which represent a major step forward in achieving the third objective of the Convention. You will also address the need for additional measures, the capacity-building requirements and the clarification of the respective roles of the Convention, the World Trade Organization, the World Intellectual Property Organization and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, which should go hand-in-hand with the application of the Guidelines.
- Second, the issue of forest biodiversity, which provides a livelihood for some 400 million people who live in and around the forests but is being lost at a dramatic rate. Forests harbour more biodiversity than any other terrestrial ecosystem and their loss is nothing short of a global tragedy.
- Third, the question of how to prevent the massive environmental and economic damage caused by invasive alien species.
- Finally, you will discuss the first Strategic Plan for the Convention, which will provide a mechanism to focus our efforts in the years ahead and rationalize the work under the Convention.

This meeting comes at a crucial stage in the life of the Convention on Biological Diversity. As you know, the international community will meet in Johannesburg next August for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. It is essential to ensure that the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity is given due prominence in the preparatory process and at the Summit itself. I would therefore invite you to seize the occasion to send a strong message to the World Summit emphasizing the interlinkages of global environment problems and the fact that the objectives of the Convention are essential to achieving sustainable development and poverty alleviation. The message

might also recognize that the Convention is an effective international instrument that can consolidate and strengthen efforts being undertaken through the numerous regional and international biodiversity-related agreements and programmes. You may also wish to consider the need for additional financial resources and need to clarify the roles of the Convention on Biological Diversity and other organizations dealing with issues involving trade and intellectual property rights.

Finally, may I reiterate our appreciation to our hosts for their warm hospitality and I wish you all a very pleasant afternoon and most successful meeting of the Conference of the Parties over the next two weeks.

Thank you for your attention.