



**CONVENTION ON
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

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STATEMENT BY
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CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
TO
THE MINISTERIAL ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION
17 April 2002
The Hague, The Netherlands

Mr. Prime Minister,
Distinguished Ministers,
Ladies and Gentleman,

It is an honour for me to be able to address this distinguished gathering. May I first thank our hosts, the Government of the Netherlands for this initiative, which provides an opportunity for a high-level exchange of views on one of the most serious environmental issues of our time: the loss of biological diversity and the threat that that loss poses to the very underpinnings of sustainable development.

The level of participation at this ministerial meeting is evidence of the growing commitment to the objectives of the Convention on biological diversity and the recognition of the central importance of the issues it addresses.

As I said at the opening ceremony for the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, there has indeed been 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 peripheral but as a foundation of economic growth, poverty alleviation and sustainable development.

Biological diversity worldwide generates a wide array of goods and services on which the 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 biodiversity is also closely related to economic conditions and questions of social justice. If biological resources are misused or over-consumed, people suffer, economies decline and poverty spreads. One of the key tasks is therefore, to ensure not only that the benefits of the biodiversity continue to flow, but also that they are shared equitably.

Most of the challenges faced in stemming the loss of biodiversity come from powerful external forces: inappropriate government policies related to trade, agriculture and incentives; lack of intersectoral coordination and cooperation; a poorly articulated role for biodiversity in defining national and international development and in poverty alleviation; a 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.

Over the last week or so, the Conference of the Parties has been looking at ways in which together we can make the Convention function more effectively. One of the key tasks is moving from policy development to action on the ground. I hope that this meeting will give an impetus to that shift in emphasis by demonstrating that the political will is there

at the highest possible level to make the hard choices necessary to translate policy into action.

In addition to political will, there is also a need for a greater transfer of financial resources and technologies to the developing countries and countries with economies in transition. Without that, the Convention cannot be fully implemented nor its objectives met.

I therefore hope that you will take this opportunity to send a strong message to the World Summit on Sustainable Development reaffirming the political commitment to the objectives of the Convention and highlighting its vitality and relevance to the problems of our time, as well as the central role that it can play in the quest for sustainable development at Johannesburg and beyond.

I thank for your attention.