



Achieving the  
**2010**  
Biodiversity  
Target

# Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

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CBD

**Congrès de l'Ordre des Agronomes du Québec**  
**Speech by Mr. Ahmed Djoghlaif, Executive Secretary of the UN Convention on**  
**Biological Diversity**  
**June 16, 2006**

Monsieur le Président Bernier, Madame Leblanc, distingués conférenciers et participants.

I am delighted to address such a distinguished assembly of scientists in the agro-alimentary capital of Québec, home of the Institut de Technologie agroalimentaire and the renowned Faculté de médecine vétérinaire de l'Université de Montréal.

Agriculture and agricultural biodiversity are subjects of enormous importance to the Convention on Biological Diversity and indeed to the survival of life on earth.

The overall theme of this Annual Meeting *La biodiversité en agriculture: A la recherche de l'équilibre* is well-suited to the topic of the work of the Convention on Biological Diversity – or *the Convention on Life on Earth* – for the Convention seeks to restore the equilibrium of nature in the interests of the well-being of all life. And, if we are to meet the challenges that I will briefly outline to you, it is only with your help- the help of the scientific and research community.

### **Biodiversity and Agriculture**

Agriculture has greatly contributed to human well-being, allowing for the very development of civilization. According to FAO, cultivated systems now provide some 94% of the protein and 99% of the calories in human diets, and at the same time, represent a major source of income for some 2.6 billion people who depend on agriculture for their livelihoods.

As human populations have grown, the extent of agricultural systems has also expanded. Today, approximately 24% of Earth's land surface is occupied by cultivated systems.

The rate of agricultural expansion in our own lifetimes has been dramatic. During the last 50 years, more land has been converted to agriculture than during the preceding 200 years. Since the 1950s, there has also been a major shift away from the expansion of agriculture towards the intensification of agriculture. This increased pressure on farmland has had many consequences, for example:

- Cultivated systems have become the major global consumer of water, with much of this precious resource wasted through inefficient irrigation systems.



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- The increased use of applied nutrients and agricultural chemicals is leading to pollution, at the source and far downstream. Most pressing is the disruption of the nitrogen cycle, caused primarily by the application of inorganic fertilizers, which included around 85 million tons of nitrogen in 2000. Fertiliser use continues to increase and its impact can be seen through increases in nitrogen loads on land and particularly in water.

In short, agriculture has been and continues to be the greatest driver of land-use change, and of biodiversity loss, in terrestrial systems, and the main source of excessive nutrients in both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. The benefits of agriculture for humanity have been at the expense of significant reductions in other ecosystem services. Furthermore, nearly all of the world's suitable land is already under cultivation. Where potentially cultivable land still exists—primarily in Africa and Latin America—further expansion would encroach on rainforest and grassland savannas that provide critical habitat for many species, and crucial ecosystem services.

Even as agriculture represents a threat to biodiversity, biodiversity is essential for maintaining agricultural systems. Biodiversity sustains the very ecosystem services upon which agriculture depends, from nutrient cycling, to soil formation and retention, to pollination, pest regulation and seed dispersal.

Agriculture is biodiversity-based and its future cannot be separate from biodiversity. Agriculture based upon diverse crops is not only more sustainable environmentally – but also more sustainable economically – and has improved benefits for the rural poor. The reality is that diversity is good all around, for everybody.

### **The Convention on Biological Diversity**

The Convention on Biological Diversity was adopted in 1992, at the Rio Earth Summit. It is a legally binding treaty, the first of its kind to consider biodiversity together with issues of sustainable development. The Convention has three objectives:

- To conserve biodiversity
- To ensure biodiversity's sustainable use
- To promote the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources.

The fundamental importance of the Convention's objectives is reflected in its near universal membership: 188 countries and the European Community are currently Parties.

To help Parties in implementing policy decided on at the international level, the Conference of the Parties has developed work programmes on seven important thematic areas, corresponding to the planet's key biomes:

- Agricultural systems, forests, marine and coastal areas, islands, inland waters, and dry and sub-humid lands.

The CBD also covers several important cross-cutting issues. Some of those that are particularly relevant to agriculture issues include:

- access and benefit-sharing, traditional knowledge, invasive alien species, economics, trade and incentive measures, the ecosystem approach, the global strategy for plant conservation, sustainable use of biodiversity and technology transfer and cooperation.

Ten years after the Rio Summit, recognizing that the Convention needed greater focus and more efforts towards implementation, the Conference of the Parties adopted a target: *to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on earth.* World leaders meeting at the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 endorsed this 2010 Biodiversity Target.

So, my presentation to you takes place in this renewed context, where the Parties have pledged to meet the target of reducing biodiversity loss, and where the Convention is making all efforts to enhance implementation of its programmes of work, cross-cutting tools, and other provisions.

In the remainder of my presentation to you, I will first outline an overall approach for addressing agriculture as a driver of biodiversity change, and mention some of the practical tools that have already been developed under the Convention that could help to put this approach into action. I will then describe in more detail some of the many different programmes under the Convention that relate directly to agricultural issues.

#### ***An overall approach to addressing agriculture as a driver of biodiversity loss***

The challenges of providing for an ever-growing human population, in the face of a changing climate and natural ecosystems that are under increasing pressure, are enormous. However, several ways forward are available to us, as described in the Convention's Global Biodiversity Outlook 2, a publication that assesses current status and trends in biodiversity, and prospects for achieving the 2010 target.

First, there is a need to limit the expansion of land under cultivation by improving the efficiency of food production. The Convention's programme of work on agricultural biodiversity, which I will describe in detail shortly, provides an important guide on how to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity for the improved efficiency of agricultural production.

Second, we must put in place better landscape-level planning, so that any new expansion of agriculture that occurs takes place on land that is already degraded, or is of low biodiversity-value. The Convention has developed an Ecosystem Approach that provides guidelines of how to integrate biodiversity-related concerns into land and water management plans.

Third, we must work to reduce excessive consumption of food, particularly by the more affluent parts of society. Meat consumption is of particular concern.

Finally, we must identify and effectively protect areas that are of critical importance to biodiversity, and which we cannot permit to be degraded by agricultural activities. The Convention has a strong programme of work on protected areas, as well as a target to set aside 10% of all ecoregions in protected areas by 2010.

Putting in place a strategy that incorporates all four of these elements is not easy, but neither is it impossible. As I have mentioned here, the Convention has already developed numerous policy directives and practical tools that can help to move us forward towards the sustainable use of biodiversity in agricultural systems.

### **Programmes under the Convention of relevance to agriculture**

I will now seek to give you an overview of some of the key programmes and initiatives under the Convention relating to agricultural issues.

#### ***The Programme of Work on Agricultural Biodiversity***

The primary tool available under the Convention for achieving the conservation and sustainable use of agrobiodiversity is the programme of work dedicated to these goals. The programme of work on Agricultural Biodiversity aims to promote:

- the positive effects and mitigate the negative impacts of agriculture on biodiversity
- The conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources of actual or potential value for food and agriculture
- The Fair and equitable sharing of benefits.

The programme establishes a vision for future work in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in that biome, and suggests potential activities, outputs and timelines. Although the programme of work was agreed to at the international level, each Party is meant to adapt it to meet their own national priorities and circumstances.

Activities under the programme of work fall under four principal elements.

- Assessment
- Adaptive Management
- Capacity Building
- Mainstreaming

In short, the programme seeks to assess the status and trends of the world's agricultural biodiversity and the underlying causes of these trends, and to assess local knowledge of agrobiodiversity management. The programme further pays attention to identifying and promoting adaptive-management practices, technologies, policies and incentives. Activities under the programme seek to promote the participation and strengthen the capacities of farmers and other stakeholders in sustainable management. Finally, the programme outlines ways in which Parties can integrate agrobiodiversity concerns across sectors, into national policies, strategies and action plans.

The Convention works closely with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on agricultural biodiversity issues, ensuring that activities are taking place at the country level, around the world. We are currently undertaking an assessment of progress made by Parties in implementing the programme of work. This review will help us to revise the programme of work, if necessary, in order to help Parties better address the main threats to agrobiodiversity.

Integral to the programme of work are several international initiatives, bringing together countries and international organizations to work on specific problems. These are:

- The international initiative for the conservation and sustainable use of pollinators
- The international initiative on soil biodiversity
- And a new third initiative, on biodiversity for food and nutrition, which I will describe to you in more detail presently, as it relates directly to issues of food security.

### ***Initiative on Biodiversity for Food and Nutrition***

The initiative on biodiversity for food and nutrition was adopted this past March, at the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, held in Curitiba, Brazil.

The initiative aims to promote and improve the sustainable use of biodiversity in programmes contributing to food security and human nutrition, as a contribution to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (particularly target 2 of Goal 1 to halve the proportion of people suffering from hunger) and as a means to raise awareness on biodiversity's importance.

Indeed, there are few more immediate and tangible links between society and nature than that represented by the food we eat. The plants and animals that feature in human diets connect us to the land and sea, but also to our own human history and culture. Yet the biodiversity that underpins human food systems is rapidly being lost, both in terms of species and genetic varieties of crops and livestock. Historically, humankind relied on more than 7000 plant species to meet their basic food needs. Today, only a dozen crops supply over 90% of humans calorific and protein needs.

To overcome hunger and malnutrition in the world, however, we need to promote and preserve diverse diets and dietary traditions. Good nutrition follows from a diverse diet—one that draws on the full range of biodiversity, and not a handful of crops. Even more so, promoting diversity in diets also supports socio-cultural traditions, and emphasizes new opportunities for income generation and livelihoods among the rural poor. We need to recognize and promote local agrobiodiversity, and help build farmers' capacities to bring their produce to market.

The framework of the initiative consists of four mutually supportive elements centred on Research, Policy, Conservation and Sustainable Use, and Public Awareness. Priority activities include building the evidence base for the links between dietary diversity and

health, incorporating agricultural biodiversity and nutrition into existing national and international policy instruments, promoting biodiversity-friendly markets, and formulating campaigns to change behaviour among consumers.

The Convention is working closely with FAO, the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute, and other international organizations to put this initiative into action on the ground, and to achieve real change. A handout describing these activities will be made available to you.

### ***ABS and Article 8(j)***

Other important tools under the Convention, that are of direct relevance to agricultural biodiversity are the cross-cutting programmes on Access and Benefit Sharing, and on the Protection of Traditional Knowledge, Innovations and Practices.

Both of these issues are of obvious concern to local and indigenous communities, including farmers. At the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, held in Brazil this past March, thousands of peasant farmers from the Via Campesina movement made their voices heard during negotiations, holding protests and meetings. It was my privilege to meet with their representatives, and learn first hand of the most pressing concerns facing rural, agricultural people from around the world. Chief among these are issues of food security, related to perceived threats from genetically modified organisms.

Under the Convention, nations are currently in the process of negotiating an international legal regime on access and benefit sharing. This regime will assist Parties in implementing the third objective of the Convention, namely to ensure the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources. The Parties have agreed to complete their negotiations by 2010.

While negotiations on the ABS regime are progressing, the Convention has made available “Bonn Guidelines on Access to Genetic Resources and Fair and Equitable Sharing of the Benefits Arising out of their Utilization”. These guidelines can assist Parties and stakeholders in developing national legislation and policies, and contracts for benefit sharing.

Otherwise, at the moment, the only other international instrument relating to plant genetic resources is the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, hosted by the FAO but developed in close harmony with the CBD. As the Conference of the Parties to the CBD recognized, at its sixth meeting in 2002, shortly after the adoption of the Treaty by the FAO Conference, the Treaty will have an important role, in harmony with the Convention on Biological Diversity, for the conservation and sustainable utilization of this important component of agricultural biological diversity, for facilitated access to plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, and for the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of their utilization. That the two instruments are in harmony, is reflected in the objective of the

Treaty itself (Article 1), as is the need for the Treaty to be closely linked with the Convention as well as FAO.

Local and indigenous communities are repositories of traditional knowledge, which often includes expertise on plant and animal resources, and on sustainable agricultural practices. Indeed, some indigenous groups continue to base their diets on up to 200 different species of plants and animals, while the trend in the industrialized world is to simpler diets and simpler food production systems. The Convention recognizes the unique contributions local and indigenous people can make to conservation and sustainable use, and has established a programme of work to promote the wider application of this traditional knowledge, innovations and practices, with the approval and involvement of the communities concerned.

### ***Biosafety Protocol***

Another area of activity under the Convention, of direct relevance to agriculture, is the Cartagena protocol on Biosafety

- In January 2000, Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted a protocol on biosafety, i.e the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.
- The objective of the Protocol is to ensure transparency in the transboundary movement of living modified organism in order to avoid or reduce potential risks from the release of living modified organisms that may have adverse effects on biological diversity.
- The Protocol divides living modified organisms (LMOs) into several categories. The two main groups of concern are LMOs that are intended for introduction into the environment of a receiving or importing Party, and LMOs for direct use as food, feed or for processing.
- In the case of the first group the exporter is required to notify the importing Party and provide information about the LMOs planned to be exported so that the importing Party makes an informed decision based on scientific risk assessment. This procedure is known as advance informed agreement.
- In the case of the second category, any Party that makes a decision to release LMO for direct use as food, feed, feed, or for processing, is required to make its decision known to other Parties through an information exchange mechanism known as the Biosafety Clearing-House so that potential importers could take take decisions as, appropriate, in accordance with their domestic regulatory frameworks. This category includes LMOs like corn and soy that are traded as commodities intended for consumption or further processing rather than release into the environment.
- Documentation of transboundary movements of LMOs for direct use for food, feed, or for processing remains highly controversial. The third meeting of the Parties to the Protocol that was held a few months ago in Brazil has finally reached a consensus on how LMO commodities need to be identified through accompanying documentation.

## **Conclusion**

As the CBD enters a new phase of its existence aimed at enhancing its implementation at all levels, the active engagement of all its stakeholders, including the scientific community is essential. To this end, collaboration with academic institutions is essential.

To celebrate international biodiversity day, an important agreement with major Canadian universities and research institutes was signed that aims to enhance collaboration between the Secretariat and the academic community, in support of the new implementation phase of the Convention. Collaborating with scientists is a key issue for the Secretariat, as they have both the expert knowledge and technical capacity to develop and promote effective actions for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

Your expertise and experience is particularly needed and welcomed for:

- (i) awareness raising among your constituencies about agricultural biodiversity and the CBD
- (ii) assisting with implementation of the programme of work where opportunities occur – in particular with the recently adopted International Initiative on Biodiversity for Food and Nutrition
- (iii) contributing information, advice and opinion on the review of the implementation of the programme of work
  - what are the constraints?
  - how can it be improved?
  - what are the emerging issues needing attention?
- (iv) facilitating the engagement of the private sector in:
  - implementation
  - research
  - participation
  - investments

For further information on any of the issues I raised, I invite you to stop by the CBD's kiosque, or to contact the Secretariat directly.

**THANK YOU...**