



CBD

Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

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International Day for Biological Diversity



Biodiversity and Climate Change

Speech by Dr. Ahmed Djoghlaf, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity at the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding with the City of Montréal, 22 February 2007

Mr Mayor,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

“What you see is but a grain of mustard but, inspired by the spirit of faith of religion, it will grow and its branches will cover the Earth,” declared Paul de Chomedey, sieur de Maisonneuve, in 1641 at the founding of the City of Montréal. Gathered here today, 366 years later, in this prestigious location once affectionately called “the Mayor’s palace”, this remark, which is an integral part of Montréal’s cultural heritage, resounds both as a profession of faith and as a premonition.

Set against Mount Royal Park, one of the largest urban parks in the world, and housing in its heart the Botanical Gardens, one of the largest in the world and a veritable plant museum containing more than 22,000 specimens from all corners of the Earth, the City of Montreal, its people and its leaders, have kept the promise of a city conceived in symbiosis with nature and therefore naturally open to the rest of the world.

It is therefore part of the natural order of things, or should I say the Montreal order of things, that Montreal should have been the first Canadian city to address the problem of air pollution. Its first regulation dates from 1872.

In the true tradition of the spirit of faith rooted in the founding fathers, M. Gérald Tremblay, Mayor of Montréal, to whom I must pay great tribute, has managed, with conviction and determination, to sustain the environmental assets of this jewel of modern urban areas and to cultivate the love of the citizens of Montréal for their city, its nature and its environment.

Through its policy to protect and enhance natural habitats, aimed at protecting 6% of the island’s land area, the City of Montreal, succeeded in preserving 110 hectares of natural habitats during the first year of implementation of this innovative policy. The 24 actions set out in Montreal’s Sustainable Development Strategic Plan are a testimony to the natural spirit of this city, its population and its leaders. The 9,000 trees planted in 2006 as well as the establishment of a biodiversity institute are additional testimony of the City of Montreal to the biodiversity.



The Gold Award of the International Awards for Liveable Communities, won in 2004, the Awards for Planning Excellence, gained in 2005 and 2006, as well as the Sustainable Community Award, came at the right time to recognize and highlight the achievements of the City of Montreal, its leaders and its people.

Situated in the mouth of the St. Lawrence River, a true crossroads between civilizations, the City of Montréal has always been a meeting place for the world's nations, and its port has long symbolized the point of convergence of people from around the world who have come in search of the open spaces that mean freedom and prosperity.

Strengthened by this age-old tradition of meeting and welcoming, the City of Montréal stands out as an international centre that cannot be ignored, a land of welcome deeply rooted in its essential values, but also resolutely facing a future that can only be common and shared by humanity without exclusion, as was foreseen, correctly, by the Brundtland Commission on Sustainable Development twenty years ago.

It is therefore in the natural order of things, or should I say the Montreal order of things, that the Secretariat of one of the three international conventions on sustainable development, known as the Rio conventions, should find in the City of Montréal its host and therefore its favourite land.

Since its establishment more than ten years ago, the Secretariat of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, which we affectionately call the Convention for Life on Earth, has found in the City of Montréal, its country Canada and its population and leaders, a truly hospitable family, attentive to its growth and protective of its development.

Marlene Dietrich used to say, "Canada, what a beautiful country! The air and the sky look as though they have been cleaned and polished, and the people too". The 70-strong staff of this unique convention have the same feeling in the day-to-day conduct of their work. Indeed, the Secretariat of the only United Nations environmental convention located in North America has benefited at all times from the unconditional and constant support of the federal authorities of the Canadian nation as well as that of the government and people of Quebec and the City of Montréal in particular.

It is therefore in the natural order of things, or should I say the Montreal order of things, that, at a time when the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity is determinedly committed to a crucial phase of enhanced implementation of its three interrelated objectives—conservation, sustainable use and benefit-sharing—it should be accompanied, even supported by the City of Montreal and other partners.

In his message to the 190 contracting Parties, published in the second edition of the *Gincana* magazine, Mr. Gérald Tremblay said, and I quote, "the City of Montréal is committed, in the future, to making every efforts to support the work of Dr. Djoghla and his team. We know that the protection of biodiversity is not only a crucial challenge for

Canada, but also for the rest of the world and in particular for the poorest countries. Let us work together for biodiversity!”

The signing today of the Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Montréal and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity is a testimony to such a commitment and I would simply like to say thank you once again to you, Mr. Mayor, and through you, to the Canadian people and the Canadian authorities.

In the words of Jacques Godefroy de Tonnancour, a great son of Montréal: “To know is to awaken to something. I owe to insects the infinite privilege of awakening to the greatness of the world”. These words, which will from now on, adorn the walls of the Secretariat, can but inspire its staff members and visitors who I am convinced will feel the infinite privilege of awakening daily to the greatness of the City of Montreal and the Canadian nation.

Mr. Mayor, I therefore wish to make before you the solemn commitment that the Secretariat, which I am proud to have led since January 2006, will do its utmost to always merit your faith and that of the Canadian nation and to contribute, albeit modestly, to making Montreal the international rallying point of the large environmental family assembled around your message: “Let us work together for biodiversity! Let us work together for the protection of life on Earth!”

Thank you for your kind attention.