



Statement on Biodiversity and Climate Change, on the Occasion of World Environment Day, 5 June 2007

“Climate change and biodiversity loss are the two major planetary environmental threats facing mankind, and they are closely interlinked,” said Achim Steiner, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, on the occasion of World Environment Day on the eve of the G8 Summit.

The clearest link between climate change and biodiversity loss is set out by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which concludes that approximately 20% - 30% of the plant and animal species so far assessed are likely to be placed at greater risk of extinction if increases in global average temperatures exceed 1.5°C to 2.5°C. It is for this reason that the Secretary General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon, has decided to make climate change one of his highest priorities. On the International Day for Biological Diversity, celebrated on 22 May 2007 with the theme of biodiversity and climate change, he stated that “the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity is an essential element of any strategy to adapt to climate change.” He stressed the important roles of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Sensitive and highly biodiverse ecosystems, especially forests, contain massive carbon reservoirs and play a key role in regulating the global climate. Olav Kjørven, Assistant Administrator and Director of UNDP Bureau for Development Policy underscores that “a stable climate is essential to maintaining biologically diverse ecosystems and in securing peoples’ livelihoods, including the maintenance of food security and access to clean water. Biodiversity provides the world’s population – most directly, the poor in developing countries – with food, medicine, building material, and bioenergy. It is particularly noteworthy that developing countries are most directly affected by the consequences of climate change, while developed countries have contributed most to it”.

The threats of climate change to biodiversity have recently been recognized as a threat to international peace and security by a special session of the UN Security Council. Equally important, these two strongly linked issues are poised to interfere with, and even reverse, progress that is being made towards the Millennium Development Goals, could potentially fuel international conflict over access to land and resources, and disrupt entire economies and international trade.

The cost of inaction on climate change has been estimated by the Stern Review at \$5 trillion US dollars. A Stern-like report in biodiversity will soon provide us with the estimated financial costs of inaction for the loss of biodiversity. It is for this reason that the UN Secretary General has called for rapid and determined efforts to achieve the goals of both the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

In this regard, the outcomes of the Potsdam G8+5 Environment Ministers meeting in March 2007 are encouraging and demonstrate the way ahead for addressing the dual challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss. At this meeting, it was “agreed that biodiversity and climate change are intertwined, and more efforts are needed to coherently address biodiversity and climate change as issues together”. The ministers, whose countries use almost three-quarters of the world’s natural resources and ecosystem services, agreed “biodiversity has to be at the top of the political agenda and must be an integral part of global economic policies”, based on the concept of common but differentiated responsibility. The ministers in charge of development issues additionally addressed “the need to mainstream adaptation to climate change in all our development programmes”.

The G8 Summit now provides a unique opportunity for world's most powerful economies to take leadership on these issues, contributing to increased global momentum for further action. A high level political commitment from Heiligendamm will help guide the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in shaping the collective response of the international community once the Kyoto targets expire in 2012. Similarly, it will also guide the next ministerial meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity in May 2008 on the occasion of the Conference of the Parties in Bonn, Germany. This meeting will look at ways and means to accelerate progress in achieving the commitments made to reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. The goals of both these Conventions will not be achieved without decisive leadership and action to jointly address the challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss.

We sincerely hope that our children will remember the Heiligendamm Summit as the birthplace of the new global consensus for determined and urgent action to address climate change and the unprecedented loss of life on earth.

