

Statement by Ambassador Antônio José Rezende de Castro at the Opening of WGRI-2

Mr. Executive Secretary,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I bring to you're the greeting of the President of COP-8, Her Excellency, Senator Marina Silva, Minister of the Environment of Brazil whose leadership, guidance and commitment to the objectives of this Convention are well known to all. As a result of her very heavy agenda, she was unable to be with us today, although she would have much appreciated to take part in our important deliberations.

Fifteen years ago, Brazil hosted in my hometown, Rio de Janeiro, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, and event that is dear to all participants to this meeting because it was on that occasion and in that beautiful city that the Convention on Biological Diversity was born through our common commitment to fulfill its mandate. It was there also that Agenda 21 and the Climate Convention were agreed, that the negotiations for the Convention to Combat Desertification were launched, and that the Rio Declaration was adopted, setting the stage and the conceptual framework for the current international sustainable development debate.

Recalling the Rio-92 Conference also means reaffirming our commitment to the three objectives of the CBD, based on a vision that transcends particular interests and involves our confidence that through political decision, international solidarity and effective cooperation we will ensure a better world for future generations.

Our meeting this week is an opportunity for us to take stock on how much we have moved forward within CBD and how much we still have to do to turn those objectives into reality.

Looking towards concrete actions, I would like to draw the attention of Parties and observers to the decisions taken in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, that acknowledged the three objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity and indicated the unwavering commitment of the international community to significantly reduce by 2010 the loss of biodiversity. This goal – as we know – was and remains related to the provision of new and additional financial and technical resources to developing countries, and to the decision confirmed in Curitiba to conclude negotiations at the earliest possible time before the tenth Conference of the Parties of an international regime to promote and safeguard the faire and equitable sharing with the countries of origin of benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources.

Although many countries have taken effective actions to achieve these targets, it is clear as the agreed 2010 deadline draws increasingly close that there is still much to be done. Reverting the loss of biodiversity, which in essence is a result of human activity, requires an unprecedented and comprehensive effort, with strong and determined responses from all the global society.

The challenges before us are to be faced by developed and developing countries alike. We all have responsibilities in this global endeavor, albeit these are differentiated. As we enter the new millennium, we must renew our efforts to transform into concrete reality the many strategies, programmes of work and effectively implement our Convention throughout all its articles and dispositions. And all of this, esteemed delegates, is intimately related to our efforts to achieve the eradication of poverty, the very first Millennium Development Goal.

It was our commitment to sustainable development that led us to the Rio and Johannesburg Conferences and to the Eight COPs that have been held since Rio. As hosts to the Rio de Janeiro Conference and to the Eight Conference of the Parties, held last year in Curitiba, Brazil will not shy away from its responsibilities. Our energy matrix is 45% renewable, against a worldwide average of 14%. We are dramatically reducing the pace of deforestation – there has been a 52% decrease in that rate since 2003. We have been reducing our greenhouse gases emissions for over 30 years by substituting fossil fuels with sugarcane-based ethanol. This has led to a dramatic fall in domestic petroleum consumption and pollution. In addition, Brazil is among the nations that most protect its biodiversity with over 700 thousand square kilometers of protected areas, an area equivalent to approximately ten percent of our territory, to which one could add another 15% of the territory covered by indigenous areas, It is also worth noting that Brazil set in place national legislation to regulate access to genetic resources, including provisions on benefit sharing. These are some of the actions that are being taken by my country to achieve the objectives of the Convention.

Distinguished Delegates,

Fifteen years have elapsed and how can we assess the progress on the implementation of our Convention?

I am sure you will agree with me that we have made good progress in many areas. Yet much work remains to be done. The reports which the Secretariat has provided to help us in our deliberations show that a significant number of parties – 77% of the total – have finalized their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NB-SAPs) and that another 24 Parties are in the process of preparing these instruments. Important progress has been made in many areas. These reports show, however, that the main constraints to implement the CBD are lack of financial, human and technical resources, in particular to implement Articles 12, 15, 16 20 and 21.

I trust this meeting shall give appropriate guidance on the further development of NB-SAPs and consider ways and means to set in place a more effective and stronger process of implementation by all Parties and the adequate functioning of the Secretariat. Such a process, in my view, requires that immediate attention be given to support developing countries Parties overcome their constraints in regard to the financial, human and technical resources to implement the CBD, including a better use of existing CBD mechanisms. Capacity building programmes, technology transfer and cooperation under

the CBD have been very limited. We need to also focus our attention on that. We expect that COP-9 will adopt a concrete strategy for resource mobilization that will enable us to continue to make progress in the new implementation phase of the Convention, launched in Curitiba. Part of this effort includes strengthening the role of SBSTTA to provide scientific, technical and technological advice to the Conference of the Parties.

As we look ahead, we see clearly that we are now far better prepared to tackle the challenges related to the Convention and sustainable use of biodiversity, two of the basic objectives of the Convention. However, I am also sure that you all agree the third objective – fair and equitable benefit sharing arrangements – has for too long languished in the background.

As we embark on our task to review the implementation of the Convention, we must not lose track of its three objectives, encompassing the diversity of interests of all nations and its components.

You may be certain that I will spare no efforts to fulfill the mandate that we received from the Conference of the Parties and to achieve the best positive results in this Working Group Meeting.

Fellow Delegates,

Since the Rio Conference, in 1992, the context of international negotiations in the area of sustainable development has become progressively more complex and has involved an increasingly large number of actors, who previously had very limited participation. We welcome that. Although as a result of this ample debate, developments by means of international consensus may not be as speedy as we hope and want, we are also convinced they are consistent once reached or remain within our immediate grasp. If, on one hand, dealing with sustainable development issues in a cross-cutting approach is more complex, on the other hand, the solutions that have been found or are in the process of being achieved are much more legitimate and democratic, in so far as they reflect a range of values and expectations.

For Brazil, this meeting embodies renewal. Renewal of formidable spirit that pervaded the Rio Summit in 1992 and that led us to significant results such as the adoption of the Convention on Biological Diversity. I hope that for all of us gathered here, this meeting will be inspired with an equivalent sense of renewal and collective conscience - renewal and conscience of commitment, of political will, and of ethical responsibility.

Thank you.