



# Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

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International Day for Biological Diversity



Biodiversity and Climate Change

**OPENING STATEMENT OF  
THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY  
OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY,  
MR. AHMED DJOGHLAF  
TO THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE  
UNITED NATIONS INTER-AGENCY SUPPORT GROUP  
ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES  
Montreal - 17 September 2007**

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*Theme - Climate Change*

It gives me great honor today, as Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity and host agency of this year's annual meeting, to welcome the members of the United Nations Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues to Montreal and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

It is my great pleasure to open this meeting in collaboration with my colleague, Mr. Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs and Coordinator of the Second Decade of the World's Indigenous People and focal point for the Secretary-General on Climate Change. Because of his obligations concerning the opening of the General Assembly in New York this week, Mr. Sha has requested Mr. Johan Scholvinck, Director, Division for Social Policy and Development to deliver his message and I thank them both for this.

I also want to extend a warm welcome to the Chairperson of the Permanent Forum, Ms. Vicky Tauli-Corpuz (Philippines), and the Vice-Chairs Mr. Wilton Littlechild (Canada) and Mr. Hassan Id Balkassm (Morocco), who are themselves indigenous peoples.

Since undertaking my duties here, almost two years ago, I have worked tirelessly with my staff to usher in a new era of enhanced implementation for the Convention. Enhanced implementation requires, amongst other things, increased efforts in inter-agency cooperation and indigenous issues. Together we can identify common goals, seek opportunities for increased collaboration, and identify ways and means to harmonize our work and maximize our limited resources. Together we can move from rhetoric to action and from policy to implementation.



I am aware that the IASG technical meeting on traditional knowledge, held in Panama in 2006, identified at least 11 UN agencies working on traditional knowledge and greatly assisted in developing synergies and cooperation to address traditional knowledge issues such as protection, retention and promotion, and has become a platform for collaborative work, as we pursue our mutual goals regarding traditional knowledge. Such lateral work is a necessary part of the UN reform process and will become a model and eventually a standard practice for the broader international system in the years to come. Thus, the IASG and such initiatives as the technical workshop on traditional knowledge are viewed as good practices in the new UN.

The Convention on Biological Diversity is unique among major international environmental instruments in its acknowledgement of the unique role indigenous and local communities play in conserving life on Earth. That indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles have close and traditional dependence on biological resources is recognized in the Preamble to the Convention. In Article 8(j), Parties to the Convention made a commitment to respect, preserve, maintain and promote the wider use of traditional knowledge relevant for conservation and sustainable use, with the approval and involvement of indigenous and local communities.

Through the Working Group on Article 8(j) and related provisions (traditional knowledge), the Parties to the Convention have created a unique and important forum which promotes active partnerships between governments and indigenous and local communities, in pursuit of the goals of the Convention.

Given the goals of the Convention, and the relevance of climate change to biodiversity loss, I was particularly pleased to see that the theme of "climate change" was chosen for this IASG meeting. Through the work of the Convention on Biological Diversity, I see that indigenous and local communities, with their vast amounts of traditional ecological knowledge, are sophisticated environmental managers who are crucial partners addressing global issues such as biodiversity loss and climate change.

In my work as the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biodiversity, I have sought to reinforce recognition of the connection between climate change and biodiversity loss. It is my view that the tragic loss of our planet's biodiversity should be as well known to the general public as the issue of climate change. Indeed, they are intrinsically bound together.

Recently, I commissioned a study which may be of great interest to you on "Indigenous and local communities highly vulnerable to climate change *inter alia* in the Arctic, Small Island States and High Altitudes", which is included in the meeting documents.

The impact of climate change on indigenous and local communities, their traditional knowledge and related biological diversity is of great concern to Parties to the Convention. The most recent Conference of the Parties to the Convention noted with concern that indigenous and local communities in particular regions, such as the Arctic,

small islands and high altitudes, are experiencing accelerated climate change and thus considered highly vulnerable. Further research conducted into low-lying lands and river deltas and semi-humid and arid lands has concluded that indigenous and local communities, especially pastoralists and semi-nomadic peoples, in these regions are also highly vulnerable to accelerated climate change.

However, I also want to emphasize that indigenous and local communities are not simply the passive victims of climate change but valuable partners in the global efforts to address climate change. Indigenous and local communities are already using their traditional knowledge to address and adapt to climate change at the local level. They have a great deal to contribute in designing and implementing solutions to address biodiversity loss including that caused by climate change.

Traditional knowledge of indigenous and local communities can play an important role in designing and implementing climate change adaptation and mitigation measures, although its potential has yet to be fully explored. Adaptation and mitigation measures to address climate change can be enhanced when they are informed by traditional knowledge and developed with the full and effective participation of indigenous and local communities.

While recognizing the important role that indigenous and local communities could have in mitigating and adapting to climate change, it is also important to recognize that these communities provide a human face to climate change. Indigenous and local communities, often among the world's most marginalized and impoverished peoples, will bear the brunt of the catastrophe of climate change. The most advanced scientific research has concluded that changes in climate will gravely harm the health of their traditional lands and waters and that many of plants and animals upon which they depend for survival will be threatened by the immediate impacts of climate change. Such conclusions require urgent and unprecedented efforts and interventions from the global community.

If we are to achieve the 2010 Biodiversity Target, to significantly reduce the loss of biodiversity, in light of the climate change crises, we must fully recognize and value indigenous peoples as custodians of the Earth's biodiversity. The active involvement of indigenous and local communities around the world is essential in the achievement of this ambitious target. As diversity contains the potential for adaptation, there must be a global effort to work together, drawing on the unique knowledge of the peoples of the world, with a special appreciation for the knowledge of indigenous peoples.

I wish you every success in your endeavors during this meeting and look forward to the outcomes and conclusions as we actively seek ways and means to work closely together in pursuit of our common goals.

Thank you.

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