



CBD

# Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

22 May 2007  
International Day for Biological Diversity



Biodiversity and Climate Change

**“Engaging Business for Protecting Life on Earth”**

**Dr. Ahmed Djoghla**  
**Executive Secretary**  
**Convention on Biological Diversity**

**to the**

**HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON  
BUSINESS AND BIODIVERSITY**

**Lisbon**  
**13 November 2007**

*Please check against delivery*



United Nations  
Environment Programme

413 Saint-Jacques Street, Suite 800  
Montreal, QC H2Y 1N9, Canada

Tel.: +1 514 288 2220  
Fax : +1 514 288 6588

<http://www.cbd.int>  
[secretariat@cbd.int](mailto:secretariat@cbd.int)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Yesterday, we heard the Executive Director of UNEP, Mr. Achim Steiner, describing how climate change has been mainstreamed in almost all relevant organizations of the United Nations family, including the International Labour Organization. Those who have contributed to this remarkable achievement need to be congratulated. He eloquently described how we as human beings are living in a transformational moment that challenges all of us. It challenges the United Nations as whole. The Secretary-General has responded to this challenge by deciding to include climate change as a priority. He designated three special envoys and convened a summit of Heads of State and Government. This transformational moment in the history of mankind also challenges the United Nations Environment Programme and the multilateral environmental agreements administered by it, including the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Secretariat.

Last week, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity had a retreat to brainstorm on how it can rise to this challenge as a team. The theme of the retreat was “The Secretariat I want, the CBD that we want”. The aim of the retreat was to agree on what the Secretariat as a team wants to achieve four years down the road and to agree on elements of a multi-year work programme covering the period 2008-2012.

Why 2008? Because we have no doubt as a Secretariat that 2008 will be the beginning of a new era in the life of the Convention. Why 2012? Because it will coincide with the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention and its opening for signature.

The 82 members of the staff that made a contribution were unanimous in their assessment: the Convention on Biological Diversity is not well known. One staff member stated that she had difficulty explaining to her 10-year old nephew what is biodiversity. A mother of a 12-year old girl stated that her daughter was knowledgeable about climate change but not biodiversity. A long-serving staff member stated that it was easier for him to tell his neighbour that he was just working with the United Nations.

A staff member who woke up at 4 a.m. the same day to prepare her contribution and her vision that SCBD should be a factory and distributor of hope. She expressed her view that we need to evolve into a centre of excellence of biodiversity and act as the hub of a network of collaborative centres. To this end, there is a need to inject biodiversity into relevant processes and to make it relevant in day-to-day business. To achieve this objective, it is of a crucial importance to engage all stakeholders, and in particular the business community. Staff members were of the view that business as usual was no longer an option, and there was an urgent need to do business differently.

José Saramago, the Portuguese Nobel Laureate, once stated: “Some people spend their entire lives reading but never get beyond reading the words on the page, they don’t understand that the words are merely stepping-stones placed across a fast-flowing river, and the reason they’re there is so that we can reach the farther shore, its is the other side that matters”. The Convention and its partners are getting beyond the reading and are reaching the farther shore to meet the transformational moment that we are witnessing.

In addressing the New York business community early this year, the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated that: “The United Nations and business need each other.” Stressing that business, trade and investment are “essential pillars of peace and prosperity”, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon confirmed that the United Nations must engage more fully with non-State actors in order to bring about a prosperous, more secure and peaceful world. In today’s interdependent world, business and the United Nations share common goals of “building and supporting strong economies and communities, providing opportunities for people to pursue a livelihood, and ensuring that everyone can live in dignity”. This statement of the Secretary-General is also relevant to the implementation of the three objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

It is for this reason that in The Hague in April 2002, a workshop on biodiversity plans for business was organized at the margins of the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. It is also for this reason that the Government of the United Kingdom and Brazil organized in London and in São Paulo workshops on business and biodiversity, which led to the adoption

at the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, held in Curitiba in March 2006—and for the first time in the history of the Convention—of a decision on the engagement of the business community in the implementation of the three objectives of the Convention.

It is also for this reason that a ministerial breakfast was organized between the ministers attending the high level segment of the Curitiba meeting and CEOs of companies. More than 300 participants attended this meeting.

Decision VIII/17 was a strong message by the 190 Parties to unambiguously recognize the need for stronger engagement of the business community in the implementation of the Convention, including the achievement of the 2010 biodiversity target. In adopting this decision, the 4,000 participants called for the engagement of business in the drafting and implementation of national biodiversity strategies and action plans; the participation of business at Convention meetings, including on official delegations; the articulation of the business case for biodiversity; and the compilation and development of tools to help companies better align policies and practices with the objectives of the Convention.

“Business and Biodiversity” received yet a further thrust when it was integrated into the biodiversity agenda of the Triple Presidency of the European Union—Germany, Portugal and Slovenia. Yesterday, The Hague and Curitiba; today Lisbon. This conference has, without a doubt, given rise to rich and insightful deliberations that will play a decisive role in the shaping of tomorrow's business and biodiversity agenda.

Let me therefore congratulate the Government of Portugal for having including the theme of “Business and Biodiversity” as a priority of its presidency of the European Union. I would like also to congratulate the European Commission for its initiative aimed at establishing a Business Facility Initiative and would like to offer the collaboration of the Secretariat in the European Community's endeavours.

The Secretariat has taken the implementation of the Curitiba message very seriously and, over the last 18 months, has greatly extended its outreach to companies, business associations and business schools. Amongst other initiatives, the Secretariat launched its Business 2010 Newsletter to provide a forum for the engagement of the business community as major stakeholders for the successful implementation of the three objectives of the Convention. Three issues of the newsletter have been prepared and a fourth one, on agriculture, is being finalized. Immediately after Curitiba and in spite very serious financial constraints, I decided to appoint a full time staff member to work as a business liaison officer. At its next meeting, in Bonn next year, the Conference of the Parties will have to decide on how the Secretariat can sustain these efforts.

Business and biodiversity will, indeed, be an important dimension of the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, and the Lisbon Declaration on Business and Biodiversity that you have just adopted will make a significant contribution to the Bonn meeting. Let me extend to Mr. Jochen Flasbach and his team my deep appreciation for the outstanding efforts undertaken by the Government of Germany in the preparation of the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties. I believe that the space dedicated to business and biodiversity will be unprecedented. This initiative will be a major contribution towards engaging the business community. The message of the business community will be also heard during the high-level segment that will also include, for the first time, a head of state component. I am also greatly encouraged by the efforts currently under way by the Government of Japan, which has graciously offered to host the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, to mobilize its business community and its commitment to build on the success of the Bonn outcomes.

Finally, when analysing the biodiversity challenge from a business perspective, I believe it is healthy to maintain a positive outlook. To borrow from Professor Forest Reinhardt of the Harvard Business School, “Most executives owe their success to optimism and opportunism (...). In most areas, successful managers search for opportunity in adversity, treating complex new problems as chances to separate their firms from competitors that are less well managed. Business problems stemming from the environment demand no less.” I believe the Lisbon conference has demonstrated how many European companies, through addressing biodiversity head-on, are clearly positioning themselves ahead of their competitors.

I started this intervention by mentioning that, five years ago, business discussions occurred on the margins of the Convention on Biological Diversity. I am convinced this high-level conference on business and biodiversity will be remembered as the place where the business and the biodiversity community decided to reach the farther shore and to begin to address biodiversity as a core, strategic business issue.

José Saramago also stated that “as citizens we all have an obligation to intervene and become involved. It’s the citizen who changes things”. I was impressed with the composition of the podium at the opening of the meeting with the participation of the President of the Parliament and the Minister of the Environment but also the representation of the innovative business community and the European Commission. We need to establish a global alliance which will also include the local authorities, the scientific community, youth, women, NGOs and indigenous and local communities. I must pay tribute to Germany for establishing the Natura Alliance with the active engagement of the business community.

I would like, here, to present a different view than that of Ms. Kirsi Sormunen, Vice-President of Nokia, who reported the views expressed in her working group on calling on the company to establish a fund of one per cent of their profits for protecting biodiversity. While this is honourable, since we are here gathered in a foundation established by a citizen of the world known as “Mr. Five Per Cent”, I would like to suggest that five per cent be adopted as a target. We see all around us, right now, what business people can achieve. We are gathered here in the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, one of the twelve largest foundations in the world in the field of arts, charity, education and science. It is the legacy of this successful businessman, who donated a large part of his fortune to establish an institution whose activities would reflect his personality, and a reminder of what the business community can do. Calouste Gulbenkian spent his life fostering the universal values inherent to the human condition—respect for diversity and the promotion of a culture of tolerance, including respect for biodiversity and defence of the environment in man’s relationship with nature.

To mark its fiftieth anniversary, the Foundation has recently set up a prize that aims to distinguish an individual or an institution whose thoughts and actions make a decisive contribution to fostering the universal values of the human condition. Mr. Francisco Nunes Correia, the Minister of the Environment of Portugal, and Mr. Humberto Rosa, the Secretary of State for the Environment, have met the eligibility criteria to be awarded the prestigious Calouste Gulbenkian International Prize. I congratulate them wholeheartedly. In addition to this, what World Conservation Union (IUCN) has done is just remarkable; what you the 450 participants, including the 160 representatives of the business community have done is just remarkable. I am grateful to each and every one of you for your efforts. Last but not least, I invite you to join me to applaud our host, Portugal, for its outstanding contribution.

I thank you very much for your kind attention.