



Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

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Biodiversity and Climate Change

Message of the Executive Secretary, Mr. Ahmed Djoghlaif, to the General Assembly on Sustainability in Tuscany Florence, Italy, 15-16 November 2007

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The landmark Brundtland Commission report defined the concept of sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” In the 20 years since the report was published, economists, scientists, decision-makers, and many others, have worked to identify how to implement and achieve sustainable development. One fact is clear; no one discipline holds all the answers, and no plan is sustainable unless it considers the many aspects of life that play into it.

As this General Assembly on Sustainability is so aptly highlighting and addressing human activities in the realm of social and economic development and integrating them into environmental plans, it is vital to sustainable development. While this has never been a straightforward task, this integration has become even more complicated, and imperative, in light of anticipated impacts from climate change.

Climate change is one of the major global challenges facing humanity today. As highlighted in the recent reports released by the United Nations’ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), recent Nobel Peace Laureate, the science on climate change is very clear - the warming of the climate system is unequivocal, and it is due to human activities. The report states, “nearly all European regions are anticipated to be negatively affected by some future impact of climate change.” In Southern Europe, climate change is projected to aggravate high temperatures and drought conditions, as well as reduce water availability and crop productivity, among other things. It is also anticipated that Europe’s natural systems and biodiversity will be substantially affected by climate change making it difficult for organisms and ecosystems to adapt. Despite these ominous projections, the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report gives us a glimmer of hope, “the adaptive capacity of ecosystems can be enhanced by reducing human stresses.”

While stopping all use and abuse of natural resources and landscapes would be the ideal way to reduce human stress on ecosystems, this is not a realistic approach. As outlined in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the natural world must be protected through various approaches including: conservation of biological diversity and sustainable use of its components. Both of which are important ways of enhancing the resilience and adaptation capacity of ecosystems, ultimately reducing the impacts of climate change.

Italy has much to protect. Your country is one of the richest in Europe in terms of species biodiversity including over 57,000 species in its fauna and over 6,700 species in its higher plant flora. As a whole, Italian terrestrial and inland water animals represent 35% of European fauna. More than this, however, Italy’s beautiful landscape and diverse natural resources have shaped your culture,



society, and economy over centuries of human history. Environmental degradation is not only a loss in natural wealth but also in national wealth.

Italy's commitment to maintaining this wealth is undeniable. Italy has designated 774 protected areas amounting to about 10% of the total national land surface. Between 1985 and 1995, your country increased its forest cover from 8.5 million to 10 million hectares through concerted reforestation activities. Additionally, ecological corridors that have been set up to link parks and nature reserves permit the exchange of genetic information, further enhancing the resilience and adaptive capacity of the natural world. Protected areas are a vital contribution to the conservation of the world's natural and cultural resources and are deemed a central part of the CBD. That being said, however, protecting the natural world is only one piece of the puzzle.

Another important piece of the puzzle is stakeholder involvement. In practice, the sustainable development of a region or country requires the participation of all sectors and, most importantly, all stakeholders. It is fitting that the region of Tuscany is hosting this General Assembly on Sustainability as this region is showing leadership and commitment to the principles of sustainable development. Over the past few years the region of Tuscany has been working towards a regional law for citizen participation based on the fact that in order to be effective, public decision-making requires the consent, active participation and involvement of local stakeholders.

More than this, however, sustainable development must also learn from the past. We should draw on traditional knowledge that has evolved out of many centuries of living within the natural world. The conference for the International Network on Traditional Knowledge, held here in Florence last June, highlighted that traditional knowledge shows us how to make use of natural resources without disrupting the environment or exhausting the resources. The value of traditional knowledge to our world today is reflected in article 8(j) of the CBD, which focuses on the involvement of indigenous and local communities and their knowledge, in safeguarding local environments. I would like to pay tribute to His Excellency Mr. Claudio Martini, President of the Tuscany Region, Mr. Marcello Buiatti, President of the Sustainable Tuscany Foundation (Fondazione Toscana Sostenibile), and University of Florence, for this important initiative.

Italy has repeatedly shown its commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainable development. The most recent demonstration of this is Italy's initiative to organize an International Network of institutions and experts on traditional knowledge as mandated by the Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. More specifically, the region of Tuscany has again shown leadership by offering to host an International Centre on traditional knowledge in Florence.

Sustainable development will only occur if all interests are addressed and all stakeholders support the development plans. Moreover, in order to implement effective development plans, they must consider the potential impacts of climate change and draw on traditional knowledge that provides valuable examples of ways to adapt. Failing to do so will undermine all initiatives from the start.

I applaud the efforts of the Regional Government of Tuscany for organising in cooperation with the Fondazione Toscana Sostenibile this General Assembly on Sustainability as the participation of all stakeholders in sustainable development plans that consider the impacts of climate, as well as the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, cannot be overstated. Thus, I wish you a productive assembly filled with valuable exchanges that will contribute to sustainable development in the Tuscany Region and beyond.

Thank you for your attention.
