



Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

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International Day for Biological Diversity



Biodiversity and Climate Change

Statement by the Executive Secretary Mr. Ahmed Djoghla On the Occasion of the 27th Meeting of the Bern Convention Standing Committee

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The world is facing an unprecedented planetary environmental challenge. Impacts on the natural functions of our planet have never been as destructive as in the last 50 years. It is estimated that over the past hundred years humans have increased species extinction rates by as much as 1000 times the typical background rates over Earth's history – as inferred from the fossil record over Earth's history. All countries are being affected. In fact, just a few weeks ago, in 35 locations around the world, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) launched its Fourth Global Environment Outlook which serves as another important reminder that biodiversity decline and loss of ecosystem services continue to be major global threats to future development and of the urgent need for mankind to double efforts to protect life on Earth. We are facing a tremendous challenge; one that is being exacerbated by climate change. As one of Strasbourg's famous residents, Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, once said, "Fresh activity is the only means of overcoming adversity." Overcoming the adversity we face requires a global alliance of partners working to reduce and reverse biodiversity loss.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is currently in its enhanced phase of implementation. To achieve the work laid out by its eighth Conference of the Parties, the CBD must build not only international partnerships, but regional ones as well. The most effective means of achieving results on the ground is to work in partnership with well-established regional mechanisms such as the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitat, commonly referred to as the Bern Convention.

The Bern Convention, drafted in 1979, is one of the oldest conventions in the world related to biodiversity, and is a legally binding instrument. The Convention had already been in force for ten years when the Convention on Biological Diversity was signed in 1992. Its work has led to the development of the Emerald Network that consists of areas of special conservation interests and coincides effectively with the European Communities Natura 2000. Through work on the network, pilot projects have been set up in various low- and emerging-income countries, contributing to capacity building and awareness-raising in Eastern Europe and Northern Africa.

The Bern Convention has brought together not only 39 European countries but also four African states. This mix of developed and developing countries is an important key to success, as it is the people in the poorest countries whose lives are most directly threatened as biological diversity decreases. Thus it is incumbent on the people in the wealthiest countries, who have the capacity and resources, to assist them. Consequently, I am pleased that the Bern Convention has accepted to form an enhanced partnership with the CBD. This partnership will enable the two conventions to better coordinate their implementation and aim for enhanced synergy between initiatives rather than repetition of them. In fact both Secretariats have a great deal of support to offer each other.

Indeed, one area in particular where we will work towards increased exchange of expertise and cooperation is that of invasive alien species (IAS). Human activities have created pathways for IAS to spread around the world. Unfortunately, climate change and the concomitant warmer world will aggravate the negative impact of alien invasive species. It is estimated that 480,000 alien species have been introduced into the varied ecosystems of our planet. Since the 17th century, invasive alien species have contributed to nearly 40 per cent of all known animal extinctions. One study from the United States of America estimates costs of US\$ 137 billion per year from an array of invasive species. Invasive alien species (IAS) is a global issue that requires international action and cooperation. Preventing international movement of IAS and rapid detection at borders are less costly than control and eradication.

The CBD has been working on this as a cross-cutting issue since our fourth Conference of the Parties in 1998 and has recently appointed a specialist in Invasive Alien Species to further the implementation of our programme of work. Including a wide range of provisions and recommendations for Parties to control the introduction of alien species and for them to identify adequate management and control measures, the Bern Convention has produced *The European Strategy on Invasive Alien Species* as well as a report on identification of non-native freshwater fishes established in Europe and assessment of their potential threats to the biological diversity. This Cooperation between our two conventions will facilitate enhanced action against IAS, at the global level.

As I mentioned, loss of biodiversity, be it from invasive alien species, climate change, or loss of habitat, affects all segments of society. The poor will suffer the most. More than 1.6 billion people depend on forests and forest products for their livelihood, while more than 3 billion people depend on marine and coastal biodiversity. And yet, more than 132 million hectares of forests are lost annually and some predict that fish may disappear from the oceans by 2048. This is equivalent to the abuse of basic human rights. If a person has the right to live freely but does not have clean air to breathe, safe water to drink, nor enough food to eat, then that person is condemned to a life of hardship and misery, and in fact has no human rights at all. Nature provides these important services to each and every one of us. Yet, the environmental degradation and biodiversity loss that we have caused, and continue to cause, reduces nature's ability to keep us alive and healthy; we limit the ability of poor households, who most directly rely on ecosystem services, to provide for themselves.

The Council of Europe is clear on this. Not only does the Council have a significant convention to protect biodiversity, its Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms guarantees its citizens a right to life and prohibition of abuse of rights. Moreover, the United Nations General Assembly asserts these as rights to every individual on Earth through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Thus, the moral imperative to reduce loss of biodiversity is undeniable and collaboration between the Bern Convention and the CBD all the more crucial.

It is for all of these reasons, and more, that I will sign, on behalf of the Convention for Biological Diversity, this enhanced Memorandum of Cooperation with the Bern Convention, in the New Year. I look forward to collaborating more closely with the Secretariat of the Bern Convention and the Council of Europe as we work to involve all stakeholders and regions in the challenge to significantly reduce the devastating biodiversity loss that we have inflicted upon ourselves. Our enhanced new action will overcome this adversity.

Thank you for your attention