



Secretariat of the
Convention on Biological Diversity



INTERNATIONAL
DAY FOR BIOLOGICAL
DIVERSITY
22 May 2008
**BIODIVERSITY
AND AGRICULTURE**

STATEMENT

of

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**EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL
DIVERSITY**

at the closure of

**THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM “100 DAYS TO THE
UN BIODIVERSITY CONFERENCE”**

Berlin, 8 February 2008

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ONE NATURE • ONE WORLD • OUR FUTURE
COP 9 MOP 4 Bonn Germany 2008



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Excellency Sigmar Gabriel

Ladies and Gentlemen

In the early nineteenth century, the German composer, Felix Mendelssohn observed that “the essence of beautiful is unity in variety”. While Mendelssohn was more likely speaking about orchestral music rather than biological diversity, his remark captures one of the most fundamental and vital, yet vulnerable, aspects of the natural world: the interconnectedness of its different species and ecosystems makes it unique, special, and irreplaceable.

Life on Earth is without doubt irreplaceable. However, this web of life is under threat. According to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, pressure from human activities on the natural functioning of the planet has reached such an extent that the ability of ecosystems to meet the needs of future generations is now seriously – perhaps irreversibly – jeopardized.

Human impacts on the natural functions of our planet have never been as destructive as they have been over the last half-century. The result has been an unparalleled loss of biodiversity. It is estimated that humans have increased species-extinction rates by as much as 1,000 times the typical historical background rates—as inferred from fossil records.

The fourth edition of the Global Environment Outlook (GEO-4), issued last year by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), serves as another important reminder that biodiversity decline and loss of ecosystem services continue to be major global threats to future development and that there is an urgent need to step up efforts to protect life on Earth. The loss of biological resources has serious consequences for the billions of people around the world who depend on nature for their well-being.

We are facing a tremendous challenge, compounded by climate change. The Fourth IPCC Assessment Report, released last year, predicts that, as a result of climate change, up to 30 per cent of all known species are likely to be at increased risk of extinction before the end of this century.

It is for this reason that 110 Heads of State and Government at the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development, committed their countries to significantly reducing the rate of biological diversity loss by 2010 (“the 2010 biodiversity target”). One year before, at the Gothenburg Summit, the Heads of State and Government of the European Union had committed themselves to halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010.

With less than two years to go before the 2010 biodiversity target deadline, the road ahead is truly daunting and poses a great challenge for the global community. Indeed, the Convention on Biological Diversity finds itself at a crossroads. The ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, to be held in Bonn in May 2008, will take place at a time of unprecedented environmental challenges, as well as exceptional public and political awareness of the importance of taking action to protect our environment. The meeting will be a pivotal moment in the history of the Convention. As Johann Wolfgang von Goethe once said, “Fresh activity is the only means of overcoming adversity”. For an exceptional meeting, the Convention has found an exceptional host and an exceptional leader promoting exceptional fresh activities.

Germany’s leadership, as the host country of the forthcoming meeting of the Conference of the Parties, is crucial to the success of the Conference—one that will have the pressing task of considering the ways and means of achieving the 2010 biodiversity target. Germany’s leadership in, and commitment to, biodiversity issues and the three objectives of the Convention was re-emphasized in December 2007 with the adoption of its National Biodiversity Strategy. The

German strategy is a shining example of what a national biodiversity strategy should entail and the development process it requires. The strategy contains a concrete vision, action areas, flagship projects and concrete measures on innovation and employment, as well as activities to combat poverty and promote justice. It also acts on the implications to Germany of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. Moreover, the strategy will be further elaborated through input from seven thematic regional forums involving the country's 16 Länder, to be held in Hanover, Munich, Lübbenau, Essen, Schwerin, Stuttgart and Frankfurt. Such all-encompassing efforts have never been seen before.

The roots of these initiatives are deeply embedded in Germany identity's, culture and heritage. A representative survey of the population on environmental awareness in Germany commissioned by the Ministry of the Environment found that 90 per cent of respondents consider it very or quite important to prevent species extinction and to ensure nature conservation. About 290 million people visit nature parks, national parks and biosphere reserves in Germany each year. Forty-two per cent of Germans who take holidays in their own country rate time spent outdoors in nature as particularly important. According to the survey, nature and landscape help to strengthen regional identity and shape a sense of home. It is therefore not surprising that the 48,000 animal species and approximately 14,400 fungi species and 9,500 plant species found in Germany are protected by 97 nature parks, 14 national parks and 14 biosphere reserves. 13, 5 % of the total land area of the country and 41 % of the marine areas of Germany, comprising 5,000 sites, are covered by the European Natura 2000.

Germany has been a leader in environmental initiatives throughout the years. As an forthcoming host of the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, this leadership role has been unique and unprecedented. Germany has been leading by example. In December 2006, Germany convened an international biodiversity expert group to brainstorm and shape the agenda of the Conference of the Parties. This was the first time that such a consultative process has been used for the preparation of any COP.

In this same period, Germany also took the initiative of establishing the "Triple Presidency of the European Union", with Portugal and Slovenia. The three countries committed themselves, together with the European Commission, to cooperate closely during the 18-month period covering their respective terms as EU President to ensure consistency in the preparation of the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in order to make it an important milestone in the global biodiversity agenda. This has never happened before for any multilateral environmental conference. A precedent has thus been established which will guide the preparation of future meetings of the Conference of the Parties

In March 2007, Germany convened a meeting of the Ministers of the Environment of the G-8 as well as Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa. Known as the "G-8+5 initiative", this is a major and unique development in the Convention process and reflects unprecedented political will to respond to the urgent need to save life on Earth through the establishment of an enhanced North-South partnership. This so-called "Potsdam Initiative – Biological Diversity 2010" was acknowledged by the G8 Heiligendamm Summit. Also at this Summit, held in June 2007, and for the first time in the history of the G-8, Heads of State and Government made the commitment to increase their efforts for the protection and sustainable use of biological diversity to achieve their agreed goal of significantly reducing the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. This has never happened before and a precedent has been established that will be difficult for future chairs of G-8 to ignore, at least until 2010.

We cannot protect what we do not know, and we cannot protect what we do not value. It is for this reason that Germany suggested, as part of the Potsdam Initiative, the idea of a Stern-

like report for biodiversity. The intention is to undertake a “process of analysing the global economic benefit of biological biodiversity, the costs of the loss of biodiversity and the failure to take protective measures versus the cost of effective conservation”. This “Review on the Economics of Biodiversity Loss” will be conducted in two phases. The expected outputs of the first phase, to be presented at the Bonn Biodiversity Summit will include: a review of relevant scientific and economic knowledge highlighting key issues; case-studies providing indications of the range of costs and benefits associated with the loss of biodiversity and the decline of ecosystem services; and elements for development of a methodological approach.

As Chancellor Angela Merkel stated in the Bundestag in March, “ecology and economy are compatible and...strategies can be developed which facilitate both economic growth and the creation of jobs while ensuring that natural resources are used sustainably.” The “Review on the Economics of Biodiversity Loss” will provide some of the insights necessary to help countries achieve this environmentally sustainable growth.

It is a simple truth that the three objectives of the Convention will be achieved only when the value of biodiversity, including its non-monetary components and the ecosystem services generated, is well understood by the public at large and fully integrated into decision making at all scales and in all economic and social sectors. This requires integrating biodiversity and ecosystem-services considerations into land-use policy and planning, into agricultural, forestry, fishery, tourism policies, and into trade and development cooperation policies. It requires a paradigm shift – the environment is no longer a “soft” issue, but has to be at the top of the global political and economic agenda. As Achim Steiner, a German national and Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, highlighted last November at the launch of the Fourth IPCC Assessment Report, “We need a new ethic in which every person changes lifestyle, attitude, and behaviour.” This is what COP9 will be about.

On the occasion of the International Day for Biodiversity, on 22 May 2007, Sigmar Gabriel, the German Federal Environment Minister, launched a “National Campaign for Biodiversity”. With the support of the “Nature Alliance”, a group of prominent individuals from politics, non-governmental organizations, business, the media, the scientific community and culture, this innovative campaign aims to promote public awareness of the value and benefits of biological diversity and of the upcoming meeting.

This is the spirit and the letter of “Nature Alliance”, which is guiding the preparation and organization of the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. Last November in Lisbon, as part of the European Union initiative “Building Better Partnerships: linking Business to Biodiversity” and under the auspices of Portugal on behalf of the “Triple EU Presidency”, a conference on Business and Biodiversity was convened. The “Message from Lisbon on Business and Biodiversity” adopted by the 500 participants, including 162 representatives of the business community will be transmitted to the High level Segment of the Bonn Biodiversity Summit. As part of this initiative, the German Leadership Initiative was launched with the support of more than twenty major German companies. This, too, has never happened before.

As the cities will determine the fate of the remaining biodiversity of our planet, there is a strong view that the battle for life on Earth will be won or lost in the cities. With this in mind, the Lady Mayor of Bonn, Ms Bärbel Dieckmann will convene a Mayors’ Conference on Local Action for Biodiversity, with the participation of 80 mayors. The resultant Bonn Call for Local Action for Biodiversity will be submitted to the High level Segment of the Conference of the Parties. This level of input from cities and recognition of their role in the fight against biodiversity loss also has never happened before.

For the first time in the history, the High-level Segment will include a component with the participation of the Federal Chancellor Mrs. Angela Merckel and other heads of State and Government. This has never happened before. The organization of the High-level Segment is also unique: it has been organized to facilitate active engagement of all stakeholders and encourage them to make firm commitments.

Another project will be the Life Web Initiative for a global campaign on protected area, to be launched at the initiative of Germany and its partners at COP9. Because protected areas are considered “Safety-Nets for Life on Earth”, this first-ever initiative aims to match voluntary commitments by States to designated new protected areas with the matching commitment of donors to dedicated financing for these areas.

COP9 will take place with two years before the 2010 deadline to finalize the negotiation of an international regime on access and benefit-sharing, as decided at the Conference of the Parties in Curitiba. Accordingly, the Bonn Biodiversity Summit will be a major step towards finalizing the negotiation on the international regime, which will be crucial for operationalizing the third objective of the Convention, namely, the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources. Conservation of biological resources goes hand in hand with its sustainable use as well as the fair and equitable sharing of its benefits. Based on your discussions here in Berlin, I am very happy to note that civil society is fully committed to ensuring the success of this strategic objective.

Indeed, the involvement and active engagement of German civil society in the preparation of the Bonn Biodiversity Summit is unprecedented. Your meeting here today in Berlin “100 Days to the UN Biodiversity Conference” is an additional testimony to such a commitment. This, too, has never happened before.

In preparation for COP9, I would like to ask one important favour from each of you to ensure that the Biodiversity Summit in May is a success: help make biological diversity a household name on everyone’s lips. It seems to me that too few people know what biological diversity entails, let alone its vital importance to our well-being and that of the planet. If the Convention on Biological Diversity is to be successful and achieve its goals, both short- and long-term, this lack of public awareness must change.

It is with great enthusiasm and appreciation that I note that the City of Bonn has already undertaken this task here. In the Convention’s *Gincana 4* newsletter, Lady Mayor Bärbel Dieckmann writes that: “With its campaign on biological diversity, the city of Bonn is striving for a great goal: by May 2008 as many citizens as possible should have become familiar with the term biological diversity, appreciate its great value and be aware of the contribution that we will all have to make [...] the issue of biological diversity that will be discussed has led to activities on all local levels, whose effects will begin to show before and during the conference and may reach far beyond this event.”

I wish to add, that the biodiversity initiatives taken now will undoubtedly reach far beyond the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. I congratulate Mayor Dieckmann on this initiative, and I challenge everyone here today to ensure that by the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties his/her constituents also achieve this basic understanding and recognize their role in biodiversity loss and conservation as well. If this can be achieved, then the Conference of the Parties will receive the press coverage necessary not only for the final push to reach the 2010 biodiversity target but also the mandate and impetus needed to be effective and successful long after 2010. As Mayor Dieckmann noted “if nobody feels responsible in person, there will be no perceivable change”.

Thus, I strongly believe that the Bonn Biodiversity Summit in May 2008 is not just another meeting but the beginning of a new chapter in the life of the Convention on Biological Diversity and new era of doing business differently when it comes to the relationship between man and nature. In offering to host the ninth meeting of the Convention, Germany has decided not only to offer the necessary conference facilities but to lead by example and to provide leadership to the world.

As stated by Mayor Dieckman in her *Gincana 4* article, “Bonn is much more than a conference site – Bonn forms part of an interactive hub, which, as is typical for a flexible network, gains impetus through the close exchange and triggers a great number of activities and programmes – beyond existing structures, organisations, and hierarchies.”.

My presence today with you is meant to convey to the German people and to German authorities as well as the Bonn city authorities, my sincere appreciation for your leadership. My special thanks are addressed to Minister Sigmar Gabriel and his team for their outstanding efforts to ensure that the Bonn Biodiversity Summit, in May 2008, will be the birthplace of a universal and global “Nature Alliance” for the implementation of the three objectives of the Convention with the full and active engagement of all stakeholders. In doing so, I hope that the participants in the Conference of the Parties will be guided by the words of Michael Succow, the German conservationist: “Our task is to consider and plan for a sustainable management of all land and sea so that they carry as much as possible of the world's genetic and ecological riches through the pressures of the next century into what we must all hope will be a stable and sustainable world beyond.”

As so rightly stated by the German writer Jean Paul Richter, “*Berlin ist mehr ein Weltteil als eine Stadt*” (“*Berlin is more a part of the world than just a city*”). During the last three days, by hosting this first ever international forum of civil society with the goal of preparing for the Conference of the Parties, Berlin and its people have made yet another contribution to bringing people together for the protection of life on Earth.

Thanks to Berlin, thanks to Germany, and thanks to the people of Germany and its civil society.

I thank you for your kind attention.
