



# Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity



## MESSAGE

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from  
Mr. Ahmed Djoghlaif, Executive Secretary,  
Convention on Biological Diversity  
on the occasion of African Environment Day - 3 March 2008

Africa, a continent with varied ecosystems, from its forests in the Congo Basin to its vast savannahs in the East, has demonstrated a commitment to protecting its environment for the benefit of present and future generations by playing a role in major international environmental processes. African countries are now parties to all relevant multilateral environment conventions, including the three Rio conventions. As early as 1985, Africa established a mechanism to address its environmental agenda. Indeed, in its twenty years of existence, the African Ministerial Conference on Environment (AMCEN) has played a leading role in assisting African countries to address their environmental challenges in a coordinated manner. In addition, under the leadership of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), AMCEN and the African Union, a continent-wide Action Plan for the protection of its environment was adopted in 2003.

Despite this commitment, Africa is now faced with escalating threats to its biodiversity. These threats are coming from changing climatic conditions, increased demand for food, fodder and energy.

In its fourth Global Environment Outlook, (GEO 4), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) concludes that biodiversity in Africa has never been as severely jeopardised as it is today. Agricultural biodiversity represents 20 to 60 per cent of gross domestic products in Africa, with most of these products coming from dry and sub-humid zones. However, these zones, vulnerable to desertification, are also threatened by climatic changes such as, soil erosion caused by wind and rain, prolonged droughts or forest fires. Moreover, it is projected that sand dunes will expand from Northern to Southern Africa, while in the East by 2020 the snows on the Kilimanjaro will disappear for the first time in 11,000 years.

Yet, we also know that a resilient and robust ecosystem, with diverse species, is a key factor in mitigating the effects of climate change. The relationship between biodiversity and climate change runs both ways. Maintaining biodiversity will not only make ecosystems resilient in the face of a changing climate, it will help mitigate climate change impacts on Africa and the rest of the World. The importance of this relationship is further emphasized by the commitment made by the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity to significantly reduce the rate of loss of biodiversity by 2010 as a contribution to poverty eradication for the benefit of all life on Earth: the 2010 Biodiversity Target.

As you celebrate this year's African Environment Day, I would like to reiterate our full commitment to assist the African Countries to implement the three objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity as well as the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. In doing so we shall spare no efforts to assist the African people and their institutions in implementing the biodiversity component of the Action Plan of the Environment Initiative of NEPAD as well as the Algiers Convention. To this end, the recent signatures of the agreements with the secretariat of NEPAD, and with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, are major steps in the right direction. I wish you a very successful celebration for the benefit of the biodiversity agenda of Africa and its people.

Montreal, 3 March 2008



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