

**MESSAGE
FROM
MR. AHMED DJOGLAF,
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY,
ON THE OCCASION OF
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY
*8 March 2008***

International Women's Day is a day of inspiration and celebration of women's lives. It connects women from all walks of life in all parts of the world. It is a day for women and men alike to recognize women's struggles, achievements, collective power and the challenges they continue to tackle.

As major stakeholders in the Convention on Biological Diversity, women have a special relation with nature in general and biodiversity in particular. In most countries, the survival of women, their well-being and empowerment depend on biodiversity. For women in developing countries, particularly in the least developed countries, biodiversity is vital for their survival and that of their families. Biodiversity is also part and parcel of their belief system and their cultural and spiritual values. It is for these reasons that the preamble of the Convention on Biological Diversity recognizes "the vital role that women play in the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity" and affirms "the need for the full participation of women at all levels of policy-making and implementation for biological diversity conservation".

The Convention is strongly committed to recognizing and promoting the integral yet distinct roles that women and men play in conserving, celebrating and sharing biodiversity. The Convention further recognizes that women, and distinct groups of women, require special consideration because of institutionalized systems that marginalize women and do not explicitly value women's contributions to biodiversity.

But acknowledging difference is not enough. Gender and biodiversity issues, and women and biodiversity issues in particular, require particular attention. To determine what actions are required to promote both women's and men's roles in biodiversity, the Secretariat in collaboration with IUCN convened a workshop with gender experts, indigenous women, and other United Nations agencies mainstreaming gender, this past January in Geneva. Together, they developed a CBD Gender Plan of Action, which defines the role that the CBD Secretariat will play in stimulating and facilitating efforts, both in house and with partners at the national, regional and global levels, to overcome constraints and take advantage of opportunities to promote gender equality. It is also a reflection of the increasing awareness that gender equality and women's empowerment are important prerequisites for environmental conservation and sustainable development.

The plan consists of four objectives: to mainstream the gender perspective in the implementation of the Convention and the associated work of the Secretariat; to promote gender equality in achieving the three objectives of the Convention and the 2010 biodiversity target of significantly reducing the rate of biodiversity loss; to demonstrate the benefits of gender-mainstreaming in biodiversity conservation, sustainable use and the equitable sharing of benefits from the use of genetic resources; and to increase the effectiveness of the work of the Convention Secretariat.

Mainstreaming a gender focus and recognizing the need to separately address the needs of women, can assist in the implementation of the Convention, as women are key to achieving the 2010 biodiversity target and beyond. The traditional knowledge, practices and innovations that women have acquired over centuries puts them in the forefront when it comes to protecting life on Earth. The full engagement of all stakeholders, in particular women, is urgently required for the enhanced implementation of the Convention and the success of the high-level segment of the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to be held in Bonn, Germany in on 28-30 May 2008 . I wish all women of the world a memorable celebration of this International Women's Day.

Montreal, 8 March 2008