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Why the CBD needs ABS – the third objective as key factor for the success of the CBD

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Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor and a privilege to address this high-level meeting in such a unique setting and to have the opportunity to highlight issues of great significance to African countries with regard to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The Seychelles give us a glimpse of the so-called lost paradise and embody in the truest sense the word “biological diversity”! In fact, the Vallée de Mai on Praslin Island, one of the two UNESCO World Heritage Sites here on the Seychelles, which we will have the pleasure to visit later today, is billed as one of the original sites of the Garden of Eden!

The exceptional environment of the Seychelles is home to a unique biodiversity. We are here on the oldest oceanic islands to be found anywhere on Earth. A unique flora, including about 80 endemic species, and fauna, with invertebrates alone contributing over 2,000 endemic species, have evolved here - species that are found nowhere else.

Particularly well-known are the Coco de mer and the giant tortoises from the coral atoll Aldabra that is home to the largest such population in the world. The Seychelles host some of the largest seabird colonies in the world. The marine life around the islands, especially the more remote coral islands, is spectacular. More than 1000 species of fish have been recorded!

However, like many other fragile island eco-systems, the early human history of the Seychelles saw the loss of biodiversity including the felling of coastal and mid-level forests and the extinction of species such as the saltwater crocodile. However, the Seychelles acted upon those threats and challenges and today is known for its success stories in protecting its flora and fauna. I therefore take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Government of the Seychelles and its



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people for their efforts in contributing to the conservation and sustainable use of their unique biodiversity. Much of the land territory (about 40%) and a substantial part of the coastal sea around the Seychelles are protected as National Parks, including Marine Parks, and Reserves. The Cousin Island Special Reserve, purchased by the Royal Society for Nature Conservation in 1968 and managed by Nature Seychelles, is an internationally-known bird and marine sanctuary which has won several awards for conservation and ecotourism.

However, Africa, as well as the Seychelles, are facing escalating threats to biodiversity which may have a direct bearing on their economies and well being. Climate change has been recognized as a main driver of biodiversity loss. 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. This will have far reaching implications on Africa and, as we know, the consequences of climate change will be particularly acute for small island States, such as the Seychelles. I wish, in this context, to congratulate the President of the Seychelles for the establishment of the Sea Level Rise Foundation, which will bring together countries, scientists, policy-makers, and other stakeholders to share ideas, technologies and know-how to support small island states, islands and other low-lying areas in adapting to sea-level rise.

For countries that are largely dependant on tourism, such as the Seychelles, biodiversity loss may have important economic and social consequences. The Seychelles, has for centuries, attracted explorers and affluent tourists who come to discover a piece of paradise. The impacts of climate change on their biodiversity, such as coral bleaching, could have an important impact on tourism.

In its fourth Global Environment Outlook, (GEO 4), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) concludes that biodiversity in Africa has never been as severely jeopardized as it is today. Agricultural biodiversity represents 20 to 60 per cent of gross domestic product in Africa, with most products coming from dry and sub-humid zones. These zones are vulnerable to desertification resulting from soil erosion caused by wind and rain, prolonged droughts and forest fires. It is projected that sand dunes will expand from Northern to Southern Africa while in Eastern Africa, by 2020, snow on the Kilimanjaro will disappear for the first time in 11,000 years. Indeed, degradation takes several forms: soil erosion, which is widespread in Africa; coastal erosion with Togo and Benin losing as much as 30 meters annually to the sea; and salinisation, affecting about 2.7 per cent of the total land area. Land degradation means that more Africans are malnourished: the continent's food production per head is now 12 per cent less than in 1981. Agricultural production per head fell by 0.4 per cent between 2000 and 2004, and Africa is the only region in the world where the need for food aid is increasing. Poaching and over-fishing in a number of African countries is another factor that could lead to collapsed stocks and cause permanent damage to the marine environment – another major threat to biodiversity that supports human life on the African continent.

In response to these increasing threats to biodiversity, the Convention has a key role to play.

A continent with varied ecosystems, from its tropical forests in the Congo Basin to its vast savannahs in the East and great desert in the North, Africa has demonstrated a commitment to protecting its environment for the benefit of present and future generations by engaging

actively in major international environmental processes. African countries are now Parties to all relevant multilateral environment agreements, including the three Rio conventions and thus the CBD. African countries were an active partner during the negotiations of the CBD and have continued to play an active role since its entry into force.

The Seychelles provide an excellent example of the extraordinary wealth in biodiversity found in Africa. Biodiversity for Africa is the source of opportunities. As you will be aware, the greatest biodiversity is found in tropical and subtropical zones, notably in Africa. Many “poor” countries are in fact very biodiversity rich! And these countries should take full advantage of this exceptional natural heritage. 90 per cent of the value of Africa’s exports is already based on biological resources.

Over the past ten years, the increasing demand by consumers of the North for ethically and environmentally sound products is an example of the huge opportunities for African countries based on the sustainable use of their biological diversity. Fair trade, biotrade and the demand for organic products are some examples of these: For instance, in 2006, consumers worldwide bought 1,6 billion Euros worth of Fair trade Certified Products, 42 % more than the year before. For products like coffee and cocoa, the growth was particularly impressive, 53 % and 93 % respectively. The sales of other major Fair trade Products – Bananas, with 31% growth, and tea, with 49 % – also grew significantly. Fair trade cotton farmers too have seen the demand for their produce more than double in only one year.

Also the global trade in natural ingredients has increased dramatically in the past ten years. Trade in herbal medicines for example is estimated at € 10 billion annually and is growing in excess of 10% per year.

The global market for organic products reached a value of 38.6 billion US Dollars in 2006, with the vast majority of products being consumed in North America and Europe, according to London-based consultants Organic Monitor. This constitutes a growth of five billion US Dollars compared to the 2005 data. As Angela Caudle de Freitas, IFOAM Executive Director, points out, the ever-growing demand for organic products offers attractive opportunities for producers – especially those in developing countries. Indeed, Organic Monitor estimates that the annual increase of sales will be between 5% and 7% worldwide.

Africa has to take advantage of this immense opportunity.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The three objectives of the Convention: 1) the conservation of biological diversity, 2) the sustainable use of its components, and 3) the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources constitute a delicate political balance upon which the Convention is founded. It brings together conservation and sustainable development.

Fifteen years after the entry into force of the Convention in December 1993, the third objective of the Convention on access and benefit-sharing has yet to be fully operationalized.

The implementation of the third objective of the Convention also represents a great opportunity for Africa at various levels.

Our knowledge of biological diversity is still in its infancy and access to genetic resources, as provided for by the Convention, is essential to increasing such knowledge. According to the 2005 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, taxonomists have described and named some 1.78 million species of animals, plants and micro-organisms. The full number of species on Earth is unknown, but probably lies somewhere between 5 and 30 million. This illustrates our very limited knowledge of the wealth and potential that nature has in store for us. Access to biological resources is, therefore, essential to advance taxonomy and encourage further discovery, technological advancement and prosperity.

In order to ensure that access to genetic resources is in accordance with the third objective of the Convention and serves to promote the fair and equitable sharing of benefits, clear procedures need to be established. Access, on the one hand, and benefit-sharing, on the other hand, must be seen as two sides of the same coin.

Benefit-sharing should of course involve the sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources, whether for purely scientific or commercial purposes. In the case of scientific research, benefits could include the training of scientists, sharing of research results, technology transfer, joint partnerships, and thus contribute to long-term development. These benefits contribute to enhancing capacity in provider countries and pave the way to a future in which all countries can fully exploit the potential benefits of their own biodiversity, in collaboration with others, and for the benefit of all. In the end, all provider countries should have the means to become users of the potential of their genetic resources.

The recent agreement reached between the world's leading producer of industrial enzymes, Novozymes, and the Kenya Wildlife Service demonstrates that access and benefit-sharing can be achieved for the mutual benefit of both the providers and users of genetic resources. Under this agreement, Kenya's Wildlife Service permits Novozymes to make commercial use of Kenya's microbial diversity in return for royalties and transfer of technology. This is only one example of the large range of North-South partnerships which are taking place in a number of sectors, such as pharmaceuticals, cosmetics and biotechnologies. Provided that they are carried out in accordance with the ABS provisions of the Convention, these partnerships provide important development opportunities for African countries.

An international regime on ABS that is clear, simple, transparent and flexible is needed to meet the needs and concerns of both provider and user countries. Once fully operational, it will make a significant contribution to a more prosperous and just world to the benefit of all concerned. It has the potential to become a powerful instrument for the promotion of sustainable development and, thus, contribute to greater and shared prosperity on our planet and hence to the security of its peoples.

Genetic resources and traditional knowledge have made enormous contributions to the improvement of human wellbeing and to the technological advancement of society. International cooperation in order to provide access to genetic resources in return for the fair and equitable

sharing of the benefits arising out their utilization, therefore, will not only benefit a few countries, but humanity as a whole.

Moreover, an international regime on access and benefit-sharing is essential for achieving the enhanced phase of implementation of the Convention. Indeed, such a regime has the potential to become a powerful tool for promoting a global partnership for Life on Earth, translating into reality the concept of sustainable development and achieving the Millennium Development Goals, including the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger.

In this regard, I wish to underline the unique contribution of the Dutch-German ABS Capacity-development Initiative which has contributed to awareness raising and capacity development of ABS issues and exchange of experiences across the continent over the past two years. Thanks to this initiative and to the support for regional consultations on the margins of the negotiation of the international regime, the African Group has been in a position to play a leading role in the negotiations of the regime in providing concrete and constructive proposals for a way forward.

One of the first scientific studies that were carried out on the Seychelles was that of Marc-Joseph Marion Dufresne in 1768, two years prior to settlement. Dufresne instructed members of the expedition to “... *give especially the greatest attention to the study and prospects of all the species of inland productions such as trees, bushes, plants, herbs, quadruped animals, birds, insects, freshwater fish, stones, soil, minerals. Nothing is unimportant. You must not avoid giving details and descriptions- everything is worthy of attention.*”

We should remember these words: “*Nothing is unimportant.*” Biodiversity and its immense potential and actual value are still unrecognized and still to be explored. We should not jeopardize this world of possibilities and act now.

Access and benefit-sharing is a corner stone of the Convention and we are at a pivotal stage in the negotiations of the International Regime. The success of these negotiations depends on the involvement, at the highest level, of decision makers, who have the ability to pull their leverage together to influence the final outcomes of this important process.

I invite you to take the opportunity of this meeting to bring your efforts together in order to rise to the challenge of this historical responsibility and can assure you of the full support of the Secretariat in this endeavor.

Finally, I wish to extend my deepest gratitude to the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany for organizing this meeting and for associating the Secretariat in this endeavor. This is yet another demonstration of Germany’s firm support for the Convention on Biological Diversity and its three objectives, and for the African region. I also wish to warmly thank the Government of the Seychelles for hosting this meeting in such an enchanting venue.

Thank you for your attention.

