



Secretariat of the
Convention on Biological Diversity



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

STATEMENT

by

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

at the

SIXTEENTH SESSION

of the

COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

United Nations Headquarters, New York

5-16 May 2008

In view of the ongoing Meeting of Parties/Conference of Parties in Bonn the statement could not be delivered in person and is being circulated



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



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Mr. Chairman,
Honoured Guests,
Distinguished Delegates,

Almost twenty-one years ago, the Brundtland Commission brought to the fore the importance of sustainable development. Yet, despite the efforts and headway made in the intervening years to achieve sustainable development, the world still struggles to achieve social and economic advancements without depleting the very same resources that underpin this progress. In fact, our excessive demands are exacting a very high toll on the natural world, and indeed imperiling not only ourselves, but also the millions of species that make up life on Earth.

When we review the statistics, in particular those related to Millennium Development Goal 7, it seems we are drifting away from, rather than towards, our goals:

- One billion people still live in extreme poverty.
- More than one billion people lack access to safe water.
- Close to two billion people lack access to sanitation.
- The global demand for resources now exceeds—by some 20 per cent—the biological capacity of the Earth to renew these resources.
- Over the past 50 years, human have changed ecosystems more rapidly and extensively than in any other period of time in human history.
- Extinction rates are now between 100 and 1,000 times higher than the natural background rate.

As the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment highlights, the anthropogenic pressures on the planet's natural functions have reached such a high level that the ability of ecosystems to satisfy the needs of future generations has been seriously, and perhaps irreversibly, compromised. These pressures are expected to increase even further as the impacts of climate change continue to be felt around the world. Until these challenges are addressed, sustainable development will continue to be undermined. We therefore need to urgently reassess the situation and identify the best way forward. Indeed, your meetings over the next two weeks will be key to reminding the world of the need for sustainable development and our commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

As you focus on the chosen thematic issues of agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification, and Africa, allow me to recall the words spoken by Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland when she was first appointed Special Envoy to the Secretary-General on Climate Change: “You cannot tackle hunger, disease, and poverty unless you can also provide people with a healthy ecosystem in which their economies can grow.”

Clean water and air, pollination of crops, protection from floods and storm surges, and the availability of medicines and raw materials are essential to our survival. This is particularly true in rural areas in Africa. In fact, agriculture and agricultural biodiversity account for 20 to 60 per cent of national GDP in Africa with most of this production taking place in dry and sub-humid lands. However, almost half of African dry and sub-humid lands are vulnerable to desertification, and climate change is expected to further increase this vulnerability by increasing exposure to wind and water erosion, prolonged drought and wildfires. Enhancing agricultural biodiversity through activities such as changing varieties and agro-forestry, can, however, avoid 10 to 15 per cent of the projected reductions in yield under changing climatic conditions. Thus, the link between conserving biodiversity and achieving sustainable development is clear.

Climate change is expected to cause an expansion of arid and semi-arid lands, reductions in the yield of agricultural systems at the limit of their heat and drought tolerance, and shifting desert dunes. In

sub-Saharan Africa, due to pressures from climate change, between 25 and 40 per cent of mammals in national parks will become endangered while as many as 2 per cent of the species currently classified as critically endangered will become extinct. This loss is threatening one of the key industries linked to sustainable development in Africa – tourism, which, in southern Africa, was valued at \$3.6 billion in 2000, with the value of wildlife for tourism estimated at \$570 million per year for Tanzania alone.

The cloud forests of Mount Kilimanjaro provide an important source of water for the surrounding population. Over the past 30 years, however, deforestation has caused the loss of annual drinking water supply equivalent to the requirements of one million people. Deforestation is not limited to the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro; in 2000 more than half of all forested areas in Africa were burned to some extent. We cannot achieve sustainable development without addressing such losses. It is therefore important to identify key species and ecosystems and recognise the contribution they can make to sustainable development. In many areas, biodiversity will be one of the few lifelines that we will be able to draw upon to keep our heads above water.

Nature's resources, which so many of us take for granted, are the result of the intricate interactions of the millions of species that make up the Earth's biodiversity and the many ecosystem services that satisfy our needs. The sustainable use of biodiversity is the main goal of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the foundation of sustainable development. And yet, we are destroying biodiversity at a faster rate than at any other period in human history. Unless we take urgent action, this trend will not be reversed. In undermining biodiversity, we are undermining sustainable development—both of which are being exacerbated by changing climatic conditions, an unprecedented environmental challenge. Yet, therein lies the key.

Due to the interconnected nature of all life on Earth, while degradation in one area limits progress in another, the converse is also true: improvements in one area support progress in another. Evidence shows that robust biodiversity and healthy ecosystems not only help mitigate climate change, they also help support rural livelihoods. Indeed, natural capital constitutes 26 per cent of the wealth of low-income countries. If we can conserve biodiversity, we conserve our chances for sustainable development and healthy lives as climate change progresses.

In recognition of the important links between biodiversity, livelihoods and food security, this year's International Day for Biological Diversity, on 22 May, will be celebrated under the theme "Biodiversity and Agriculture". This is also why the Joint Liaison Group of the Rio Conventions has expanded its efforts to create synergy between our efforts so as to effect the greatest change possible. Finally, it is for this reason that the Secretary General has responded to the call from the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity to integrate the 2010 biodiversity target as part of the Millennium Development Goals. Indeed, we have less than two years to reach this goal of significantly reducing the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on Earth.

As your Chairman has pointed out, "We need to tackle the environmental, social and economic dimensions [of the challenges caused by climate change] in an integrated and balanced manner". In the upcoming discussions at the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on Biological Diversity, this call will be taken up in many areas. The programme of work on agricultural biodiversity will be considered for in-depth review and proposals on improving the conservation and sustainable use of agricultural biodiversity under changing climatic conditions will be discussed. Gaps in information concerning the biodiversity of dry and sub-humid lands will also be addressed in light of emerging risks from climate change. Additionally further efforts towards the implementation of the joint work programme between the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention to Combat Desertification will be launched.

Throughout the discussions at COP, a common theme will be the application of the ecosystem approach. The main principles of the ecosystem approach focus on capacity building; participation;

information gathering and dissemination, research; comprehensive monitoring and evaluation; and governance. As such, advantages of the ecosystem approach include: stakeholder participation; consideration of both scientific and technical and traditional knowledge; and the achievement of balanced ecological, economic and social costs and benefits.

Since the ecosystem approach takes a broad perspective to management, it is an ideal methodology through which the multiple impacts from climate change, desertification and biodiversity loss, can be reflected in comprehensive and responsive sustainable development planning. This in fact, follows the precedence set by the Brundtland report, which approaches environment and development issues as one common challenge to be solved by collective multilateral action rather than through the pursuit of national self-interest.

Synergies and cooperation between all UN organizations are key not only to the United Nations goals of “Delivering as One”, but also to achieving our individual goals. The CSD is a chance to brainstorm, exchange ideas, and draw on each agency’s expertise and experiences to capture value-added and bring the world closer to achieving the goals of sustainable development.

Thus, I wish to reiterate the CBD’s commitment to working alongside the CSD. Together we can effectuate greater change. I wish you success with your meetings and look forward to continued cooperation between our respective bodies. I would like to leave you with the words of another wise Norwegian, playwright Henrik Ibsen, who once said, “A community is like a ship; everyone ought to be prepared to take the helm.”

Thank you for your attention.