



Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity



MESSAGE FROM AHMED DJOGLAF EXECUTIVE SECRETARY TO THE G8 ENVIRONMENT MINISTERS MEETING KOBE, JAPAN, 24-26MAY 2008

The unfolding global food crisis is unprecedented in nature. The prices of basic staple foods are at record highs, and global food stocks are at historical lows. Since your last meeting in Potsdam, in March last year, wheat prices have risen by 130%. Since the beginning of this year the price of rice has doubled. An increase of 1% of food price generates more than 16 million newly hungry people. By 2025, more than 1.2 billion people may be affected, in particular in Africa. By 2050, the world will have to feed a population of 9 billion, which is 50% more than today. The Africa urban population will triple in less than two decades. Two thirds of humanity will be living in cities rather than in rural areas and 150 growing cities will soon reach the size of New York.

The current global food crisis is not a cyclical one. It is structural in nature. The era of cheap food may be over and the era of perceived unlimited and infinite natural resources is definitely over. The business-as-usual scenario is no longer an option for the world. Protecting biodiversity and maintaining ecosystem services is therefore not an option but a necessity for our collective survival. Indeed, addressing the root causes of this “silent tsunami”, in the words of the World Food Programme, requires structural, systemic, societal and cultural changes of an unprecedented nature

Around 20 per cent of domestic animal breeds are at risk of extinction, with one breed lost each month. Since the dawn of history, humans have used more than 7,000 plant species to satisfy their needs. Seventy-five per cent of the food crop varieties we once grew have disappeared from cultivation in the last 100 years. Today, a mere 14 animal species and four plant species account for 90% of our food. Rice is a staple food for nearly half of the world’s population.

Because of climate change, in sub-Saharan Africa, yields from rain-fed agriculture could fall by 50% by 2020. Indeed, biodiversity is being lost at unprecedented rate. During the past 50 years, humans have altered ecosystems more rapidly and extensively than in any other period in human history. Indeed, more land was converted to cropland during the last fifty years than in recent history. These transformations have an impact on ecosystems and the ecosystem services upon which all life relies. Sixth per cent of ecosystem services are being degraded as a result of human activity. Pressure from human activities on the natural functioning of the planet has reached such an extreme that the ability of ecosystems to meet the needs of future generations is now seriously—perhaps irreversibly—jeopardized.

Never since human beings first appeared on Earth has anthropogenic change to our planet’s natural functioning been so destructive as it has been over the last half-century, resulting in an unparalleled extinction of biodiversity on Earth. The current rates of biodiversity loss are estimated to be up to 100 times the natural extinction rate. This unprecedented loss of biodiversity is being compounded by the negative impact of climate change. Up to 30% of all known species may disappear



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before the end of this century owing to climate change. More than 80% of biodiversity is found in tropical forests. However, every minute, 20 hectares of forests are disappearing. Globally, at least 4.4 million trees are cut down every day and 1.6 billion trees lost every year. While biodiversity is a victim of climate change, it is also of part of any effective response to that challenge. Conserving forests can reduce atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases by up to 20%. Wetlands contain more carbon than all of the world's forest combined.

It is for this reason that Mr Ban Ki-Moon, the United Nations Secretary-General, stressed that, "The conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity is an essential element of any strategy to adapt to climate change". Japan acknowledged this in its third national biodiversity strategy and action plan. The Strategy calls for a "Grand Design" based on adaptive management, the precautionary approach and the full engagement of society. All three are elements of the ecosystem approach adopted under the Convention on Biological Diversity. We need such a "Grand Design" also at the global level. This will require a Global Alliance for protecting life on Earth. It will require a renewed international cooperation. The 2010 Potsdam Initiative is a major step in the right direction. The G8+5+3 is also another significant step in the right direction. This "Grand Design" for protecting life on Earth cannot be achieved without the full engagement of all stakeholders, including business, the indigenous peoples, the NGOs, the scientific community, the parliamentarian, the local authorities and the youth.

As stated recently by Mr. Yasuo Fukuda, the Prime Minister of Japan, "It is important for each country to address sincerely what they are able to do and what they should do toward the achievement of the 2010 biodiversity target and additional targets, by collaborating with other countries, international organizations, NGOs and so forth. Japan is determined, in Asia and in the international community, to actively contribute to such activities and make further efforts toward the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity as a potential host of the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention."

The "Nagoya vision" for a global "Grand Design" calls for a strength of purpose with a sense of leadership. By elevating, for the first time, the biodiversity agenda at the level of the Heiligendamm G8 Summit, German Chancellor Angela Merkel has indeed provided leadership. By initiating the Potsdam 2010 Initiative, Sigmar Gabriel, the Federal Minister of the Environment of Germany, has also provided leadership. By hosting the historical ninth United Nations Conference of the Parties in Bonn this month, the German people have also provided leadership. By including biodiversity on the agenda of the Hokkaido Toyako Summit, Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, too, has provided leadership.

By initiating the G8 + 5 + 3 initiative, Ichiro Kamoshita the Minister of Environment of Japan has also provided leadership. By offering to host the tenth United Nations Biodiversity Conference in Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture, in October 2010, the Japanese people have also provided leadership.

I would like therefore to applaud the Japan/European Union biodiversity partnership as reflected in the declaration adopted at the summit held in April this year. Today in Kobe and next week in Bonn, the international community is called upon to provide leadership to address the challenges of the unprecedented loss of biodiversity compounded by climate change for the benefit of all people and life on Earth.

Your meeting in Kobe offers therefore a unique opportunity to translate this commitment into concrete action in harmony with the motto of the Bonn Biodiversity Summit "One Nature, One World: Our Future". Indeed, as stated by Mrs. Gro Harlem Brundtland, "The time for diagnosis is over and the time for action is now".

I thank you for your kind attention.
