



Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity



Message from the Executive Secretary

Ahmed Djoghlaif

**To the participants of the 38th biennial World Farmers' Congress in
Warsaw, Poland, Friday 6th June 2008**

Distinguished participants,

It is a privilege for me to address this message to the 38th World Farmers' Congress, as the Executive Secretary of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. The conservation of the world's biodiversity is critical for the sustainable future of the planet, and the actions of farmers will play a critical role in how successful we are.

Agriculture currently occupies approximately 40 percent of the world land's surface. At the global level, conversion of natural habitat to agricultural uses is the single greatest threat to biodiversity. Agriculture is by far the most consumptive human use of fresh water, with 70% of the total water use. Cultivation has also accelerated and modified the spatial patterns of nutrient cycling, particularly those related to nitrogen and phosphorus. Most pressing is the disruption of the nitrogen cycle, caused primarily by the application of inorganic fertilizers, which included around 85 million tons of nitrogen in 2000

According to the FAO, of the 27,000 species of higher plants, about 7,000 have been cultivated since humans first began farming. However, today, only 30 crops provide an estimated 90% of the world population's dietary energy requirements, with wheat, rice and maize alone providing about half the dietary energy consumed globally. It is estimated that about three-quarters of the genetic diversity found in agricultural crops have been lost over the last century, and this genetic erosion continues. Concerning animal diversity, of the estimated 15,000 species of mammals and birds, only some 30 to 40 have



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been domesticated for food production and less than 14 species (including cattle, goats, sheep, buffalo and chickens) account for 90% of global livestock production. In recent decades there has also been alarming genetic erosion within these species. For example, during the past six years, almost one breed has been lost each month!

On the positive side - over the past few decades agriculture has made enormous contributions to feeding the planet and lifting people out of poverty. Farmers have also played the leading role in maintaining the agricultural biodiversity we still have and many have made genuine efforts to reduce the impact of farming. Yet agriculture is faced with enormous challenges: to double food production by 2050; to further reduce poverty; to diversify diets and agricultural economies; and to become more sustainable. As if not enough, agriculture is faced with rapidly changing conditions resulting from climate change. Clearly these challenges cannot be met through “business as usual”.

The ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity concluded in Bonn, Germany, on 30 May 2008. This historical meeting was attended by over 4,600 participants including over 100 ministers and was the largest and most successful conference on biodiversity ever held, raising the bar on action that the international community will take towards the achievement of the target to significantly reduce the rate of loss of biodiversity by 2010 and beyond.

This meeting was particularly significant as it reviewed the implementation of the CBD Programme of Work on Agricultural Biodiversity. The incredible importance of agricultural biodiversity to sustaining and improving human well-being, and in particular through hunger and poverty alleviation, was well recognised, as well as the critical role of farmers, their knowledge and their know-how, to preserve this agricultural biodiversity. The meeting also, for the first time, clearly addressed the complex question of biofuels and its impact on biodiversity, laying down a course of action towards solutions to this critical issue.

I note with great appreciation that the President of IFAP was not only able to participate in this meeting but gave a resounding and concise statement of the perspectives of farmers on what needs to be done. The meeting reaffirmed that farmers already play a critical role both in the conservation, sustainable

use and enhancement of agricultural biodiversity and in making significant efforts to reduce the impacts of agriculture on the broader environment.

I believe that these challenges can be met – and that the role that farmers play is central to this success. Farmers, after all, are the people managing biodiversity on the ground – literally in the field. They are part of the solution to agricultural biodiversity enhancement and should be more fully recognised as such.

I start from the premise that farmers are like everyone else – their primary concern is sustaining their livelihoods and within that context wish, if enabled, to do the right thing to make the world a better, safer and more secure place. But what should farmers do?

Farmers already recognise that agricultural biodiversity underpins the agriculture we have today. But we must better recognise that biodiversity is our ally in meeting the challenges ahead. I encourage farmers to continue to pay attention to the wider and expanded use of biodiversity because I believe it is in your interest to do so. And in the cases where farmers incur additional costs, farmers need to improve dialogue with policy makers and to seek fair, equitable and appropriate incentives for them to be able to farm in their colour of choice – green.

In this regard I am pleased to invite you to consider biodiversity as one of your policy themes for the next World Farmers Congress, in 2010, in recognition of that year as the International Year for Biodiversity. The next IFAP Congress will coincide with the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity to take place in Nagoya, Japan that same year. This will be an opportunity for both our organisations, to develop by then, a road map for a long term collaboration which goes beyond the signature of our memorandum of cooperation. I also encourage a strong participation of IFAP farm leaders during CBD COP 10 to seize this opportunity to call upon national governments to listen to your concrete proposals and share with them your vision on the implementation of the program of work on agricultural biodiversity. I think that this is important in order to acknowledge your critical role and that the world will listen to you. I offer my fullest support in these endeavours. Our respective Secretariats will commence preparations for this to be a success. We have already started by collaborating on the provision of improved information on biodiversity for your members.

I pledge to further strengthen our collaboration with farmers' organisations in all necessary areas and strengthening our joint efforts towards our common goals.

I wish you a successful meeting in Warsaw.

Information for Journalists:

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

The Convention on Biological Diversity is one of the most broadly subscribed international environmental treaties in the world. Opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro Brazil in 1992, it currently has 190 Parties—189 States and the European Community—who have committed themselves to its three main goals: the conservation of biodiversity, sustainable use of its components and the equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources. The Secretariat of the Convention is located in Montreal.

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