



Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity



**Statement from
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Executive Secretary
Convention on Biological Diversity**

On the occasion of the

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In its fourth Global Environment Outlook (GEO 4), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) concluded 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 could 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 is leading to collapsed stocks and causing permanent damage to the marine environment.

The world we are passing to future generations is significantly different from the one we inherited. For example, as a result of increasing human demands on ecosystems and drought exacerbated by climate change, total available water in the Niger, Lake Chad and Senegal basins has decreased by 40 to 60% over the past 100 years. Impacts of climate change on biodiversity as predicted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change further threaten the invaluable natural heritage of Africa. By 2050, between 25 and 40% of mammals in national parks in sub-Saharan Africa, will become endangered as a result of climate change, while as many as 2% of the species currently classified as critically endangered will become extinct. In the Succulent Karoo and Fynbos ecosystems in Southern Africa, more than 50% of habitat is also expected to be lost.

Increasing threats to ecosystem services have negative consequences for biodiversity-based livelihoods, particularly among the poor. The coasts of Africa support vibrant fisheries which provide up to 50% of protein requirements to some coastal communities and support a quarter of Africa's population. While a warming of 1 to 2°C may increase agricultural production in humid temperate regions, the same temperature increase is expected to decrease yields in arid, semi-arid and tropical regions where some of the poorest populations are based.



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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 (CBD, UNCCD and UNFCCC). African countries were active partners during the negotiations of the CBD and have continued to play an active role since its entry into force. The Algiers Convention, with its principle to ensure conservation, utilization and conservation of soil, water, faunal and floral resources, is a strong implementation arm of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

Moreover, in February 2007, the Secretariat of the CBD and the Secretariat of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) signed a Memorandum of Cooperation on capacity building for the implementation of the CBD and its Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. Later that year, the Secretariat of the CBD and the United Nations Regional Economic and Social Commissions, including the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), signed a Memorandum of Understanding. It was agreed to, amongst other things, cooperate with a view to integrate the objectives of the CBD into regional activities and processes, as well as assist in the preparation and implementation of the CBD programme on South-South cooperation. The G77 is also making efforts to promote South-South cooperation.

Protected areas, besides being cornerstones of biodiversity conservation, constitute an important stock of natural, cultural and social capital, yielding flows of economically valuable goods and services that benefit human populations. The positive contribution of protected areas to the livelihoods of the poorest and most vulnerable sectors of society is very high. As unprecedented climate change becomes a reality, protected areas are key to buffering the inevitable yet unpredictable impacts. A number of African countries have currently made pledges to expand coverage of both marine and terrestrial protected areas and to improve their management and representativeness. Regional workshops were recently organised by the CBD Secretariat and its partners, the POWPA Friends, and held in Cape Town and Libreville to strengthen capacity for enhanced implementation of the CBD programme of work on protected areas. Another regional workshop on the implementation of National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs) was organized earlier this year in South Africa.

In April 2008, African leaders met in Seychelles to discuss Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS) in preparation of the High-level Segment of the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. An international regime on ABS that is clear, simple, transparent and flexible is required 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. As such, I propose that the CBD, in cooperation with the AMCEN Secretariat, support this initiative, through negotiation and implementation of the regime.

In addition, since 2010 has been declared the International Year for Biodiversity, I believe it would be a great timing to make biodiversity the main topic of the agenda of the next African Ministerial Conference on the Environment in 2010. I would also like to suggest that future regional preparatory meetings for Conferences of the Parties be convened in cooperation with the AMCEN Secretariat and UNEP's regional office for Africa, as agreed during the meeting with all UNEP's regional directors on 18 April 2008.

Recognizing that Africa is facing imminent threats which require further attention and action, we must join forces to increase Africa's participation in international dialogues and negotiations addressing environment and biodiversity.

Thank you.