



Secretariat of the
Convention on Biological Diversity



INTERNATIONAL
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**BIODIVERSITY
AND AGRICULTURE**

MESSAGE
FROM
THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

AHMED DJOGLAF

on the occasion of the

**FOURTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE FOR FOOD, ENERGY AND
INDUSTRY**

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Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Seventy-five per cent of the food crop varieties we once grew have disappeared from our fields in the last 100 years. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), around 20 per cent of domestic animal breeds are at risk of extinction, with an average of one breed lost each month. Of the 7,000 species of plants that have been domesticated over the 10,000-year history of agriculture, a mere 30 account for 90 per cent of all the food that we eat every day. However, as growing conditions change, due to climate change and other factors, the species required may also change. Thus, the reliance on so few plants makes human populations vulnerable to climatic change, and current extinction rates exacerbate makes our position particularly perilous.

The global food crisis is a wake-up call to the serious consequences of human activities on the ability of our planet to continue sustaining life on Earth. While not caused solely by the decreases in the number of cultivated species, the current food crisis is an example of what lays ahead if we continue to allow the loss of agricultural biodiversity, despite predicted global changes in growing conditions. Dramatic rises in crop prices could well become a symptom of the unprecedented loss of agricultural biodiversity and certainly a reflection of its far-reaching impacts on mankind.

It has been estimated that agriculture currently occupies approximately 40 per cent 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, accounting for 70 per cent of total water use. Cultivation has also accelerated and modified the spatial patterns of nutrient cycling, particularly those related to nitrogen and phosphorus. The most pressing issue is the disruption of the nitrogen cycle, caused primarily by the application of inorganic fertilizers, which included around 85 million tonnes of nitrogen in 2000

Currently, the “ecological footprint” of humankind extends 25 per cent beyond the biological capacity of the planet – and yet by 2050, the world population is expected to have increased by 50 per cent. Moreover, the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 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. The mathematics of meeting the needs of the world are clearly impossible if we continue with the status quo.

It is for this reason that the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has implemented programmes of work on agricultural biodiversity and climate change and biodiversity, as well as cross-cutting initiatives on food and nutrition. In recognition of the important links between biodiversity, livelihoods and food security, this year's International Day for Biological Diversity, on 22 May, was celebrated under the theme “Biodiversity and Agriculture”. And it is for this reason that I send this message of support to the Fourth International Conference on Sustainable Agriculture for Food, Energy and Industry.

As stated recently by Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, “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 biodiversity 2010 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 COP-10.”

During your conference in Japan, I trust that you will be reminded that living in harmony with nature and maintaining a rich biodiversity while meeting human needs is possible, as the tradition of *satoyama* and *satoumi* has shown the world. May your exchanges be inspired by these traditional, sustainable agricultural principles and landscapes.

Japan's contribution to conservation of biodiversity is in line with the spirit and letter of its recently finalized third national biodiversity strategy and action plan, which 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. Indeed, we also need this type of "Grand Design" at the global level. Doing so will require a global alliance for protecting life on Earth. It will require renewed international cooperation. The 2010 Potsdam Initiative is a major step in the right direction. The G8+5+3 initiative 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 the scientific community, business, indigenous and local communities, non-governmental organizations, parliamentarians, local authorities and the youth.

We have less than two years to reach the goal of significantly reducing the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level as a contribution to poverty alleviation and for the benefit of all life on Earth.

Achieving significant, sustainable change requires input from all sectors, but understanding the science and identifying potential solutions is a key first step. I wish you success in your meeting and encourage you to disseminate your proceedings widely to all stakeholders so that we can all continue to work towards sustainable agricultural systems that can meet the world's growing nutritional demands while conserving the biological diversity upon which our food supply ultimately depends.

I thank you for your attention.