



Secretariat of the
Convention on Biological Diversity



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

Statement by the Executive Secretary

DR. AHMED DJOGLAF

“SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: Which way next”

On the occasion of the

**GLOBAL INDIAN DIASPORA CONFERENCE
(Pravasi Bharatiya Divas)**

Towards a Dynamic Indian Diaspora

Singapore, 11 October 2008



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



United Nations
Environment Programme

413 Saint-Jacques Street, Suite 800
Montreal, QC H2Y 1N9, Canada

Tel : +1 514 288 2220
Fax : +1 514 288 6588

<http://www.cbd.int>
secretariat@cbd.int

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen ,

The ancient Hindu hymn of praise, Devistotra, tells us that, “So long as this land will have mountains, forests and pastures, that long the Earth will survive, sustaining you and the coming generations.” Until recently, humankind could believe that this meant the Earth would sustain us forever. However, with each passing day, and if current trends continue to prevail, this seems more and more unlikely. The unfolding food crisis is of a structural nature and may usher in a new era of scarce resources. Indeed, pressures exerted on the planet’s natural functions by human activity have reached such a level that the ability of ecosystems to meet the needs of future generations is now seriously, and perhaps irretrievably, compromised. Never since human beings first appeared on Earth has anthropogenic change to our planet’s natural functioning been as destructive as it has been over the last half-century, resulting in an unparalleled extinction of biodiversity on Earth. The rate of extinction may be today 1000 times higher than the natural rate of extinction. For some experts we may be in the midst of a sixth global mass extinction of species and the first to be generated by us, the human species.

This unprecedented loss of biodiversity is being compounded by climate change. The IPCC Assessment Report demonstrates that 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 relationship between biodiversity and climate change is a two-way street. Yes, climate change is an important driver of biodiversity loss. At the same time, however, the loss of biodiversity and the deterioration of natural habitats also contribute to climate change. Forests account for as much as 80 per cent of the total above-ground terrestrial carbon while peatlands, which only cover 3 per cent of the world’s terrestrial surface, store 30 per cent of all global soil carbon or the equivalent of 75 per cent of all atmospheric carbon. Until recently, forests covered 47 percent of the Earth’s land surface. Since then, they have totally disappeared in 25 countries and, in a further 29 countries, 90 per cent of forest cover has been lost. Each year about 13 million hectares of the world’s forests are lost due to deforestation. Deforestation is currently estimated to be responsible for 20 per cent of annual human-induced CO₂ emissions.

The cost of inaction for climate change has been evaluated by the Stern report at more than 5,000 billion dollars. Thanks to the leadership of Germany, a similar report on the cost of inaction for the loss of biodiversity, “The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity” led by a member of the Indian Diaspora, Pavan Sukhdev, is being prepared. Initial results put the cost implications of lost biodiversity at close to 3 trillion dollars. He also highlighted that the car industry earns only 1.9 trillion, the IT industry 0.95 trillion, and steel 0.6 trillion.

. In 2002-2003, 80 per cent of new chemicals introduced globally as medical drugs could be traced to or were inspired by natural products. The annual world fish catch is estimated to be worth US\$ 58 billion, while the global annual value of pollinator services, key to many cash crops, is estimated to be between US\$ 112 and 200 thousand million. Indeed, biodiversity is not only the foundation of life on Earth but also the foundation of the world economy. More than 1.6 billion people depend on forests products for their livelihood and more than 3 billion people depend on marine and costal biodiversity. More than 1.3 billion people depend on fisheries, forests and agriculture for employment. The report recently released by ILO and UNEP predicts that more than 20 millions jobs will be created by 2020 in the renewable energy sector alone. Indeed green business is good business, tomorrow’s business will be green, and tomorrow starts today.

As Minister mentor the former Prime Minister of our host country, Singapore, HEM Lee Kuan Yew, stated in a speech addressing the inaugural meeting of the Nature Conservancy’s Asia Pacific Council:

‘Greening Singapore has been good for our people, for our business and for our region. Our people want to live in an environment in which they can breathe the air, drink the water, swim in our rivers and sea, live, work and play on land which has not been poisoned by chemicals, and are protected from excessive noise pollution. Our clean environment has been a competitive advantage, attracting companies, workers and tourists to Singapore. Our example has inspired our neighbours who have tried to out-green and out-

bloom each other. Greening is a positive competition that benefits every one, good for morale, tourism and business.’

Indeed, biodiversity loss can no longer be considered as simply an environmental issue—a societal concern that can be addressed by writing a cheque to a local conservation organization. I think—and, more to the point, businesses increasingly think—that it is more appropriate to frame biodiversity as an issue that has a profound influence on brand value, sustainability of supply chains, access to markets, and so forth. Biodiversity, in other words, is also a strategic business issue that needs to be understood and managed. Biodiversity is becoming more and more a business concern.

It is for this reason that the world leaders in Johannesburg at the World Summit on Sustainable Development decided to substantially reduce the loss of biodiversity by 2010. It is also for this reason that the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity and will call a special session in September 2010 devoted to biodiversity. Achieving this strategic objective requires a paradigm shift. And because biodiversity is the foundation of all life on Earth, its loss affects every person, every company, every sector, every government, every country – every member of the Indian Diaspora.

This is why I am so pleased to have been invited to address you today. The Indian Diaspora and other elite of the world have a major role to play in responding to the call of Prime Minister Lee who stated that “‘The time has come for Asia’s governments, business leaders, NGOs...to forge partnerships to tackle Asia’s most pressing concern, the environment - a global concern’.

During the last two days we have learned that the 21st century will be the Asian century. A report of Goldman Sachs predicts that by 2050, India will become the second largest economy in the world after China. The new Indian multinationals will have a major role to play in shaping the world economy of tomorrow through the emergence of new Indian business leadership. Indian companies have plans to invest 500 billion dollars over the next three years in infrastructure and manufacturing projects. The pipeline of projects far exceeds all investment in the history of the country. If not managed properly, this unprecedented growth will have far reaching implications for the environment. This may be also compounded by unprecedented urban population growth. India already has 10 of the 30 fastest growing cities in the world. It is projected that 140 million rural dwellers will migrate to the cities by 2020 and the equivalent of all of Europe by 2050. That translates into 45,000 rural migrant arriving in Indian cities every day between now and 2050, or 31 per minute. This may affect the unique biodiversity of India, comprising more than 45,000 plants and 89,000 animal species.

Indeed the battle for life on earth will be won or lost in cities. To win this battle we need to win the heart and soul of the people. Prof. Tommy Koh, the moderator of our first session said:

“In the final analysis, the goal of sustainable development cannot be achieved by Government, business, experts, international organizations and NGOs alone. We have to win the hearts and minds of the citizens of the world. We have to inculcate in every child a love of nature. We have to influence the daily habits and lifestyles of peoples all over the world. We should aim to persuade every consumer in every country to internalize the ethic of ‘reduce, re-use and recycle’.”

To this end we should be inspired and guided by the wisdom of the spiritual teacher Swami Sivananda who wrote “A mountain is composed of tiny grains of earth. The ocean is made up of tiny drops of water. Even so, life is but an endless series of little details, actions, speeches, and thoughts. And the consequences whether good or bad of even the least of them are far-reaching”. The Indian Diaspora is well positioned to facilitate long-lasting change based on millennia of accumulated traditional knowledge coupled with the best of what modern science and technology can provide. Indeed the Indian Diaspora has a major role to play by continuing to use their mastery of English while acting as Indians in harmony with their culture, their identity and therefore their nature.

I think you very much for your kind attention.