



Secretariat of the  
**Convention on Biological Diversity**



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

**STATEMENT**

*by*

**THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**

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**“THE UNITED STATES AND THE CONVENTION ON  
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY”**

**George Washington University Law School  
Washington, D.C.**

**12 November 2008**

*Please check against delivery*



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



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Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the middle of 2007 through the early months of this year, the United States of America realized that it was facing a credit crunch. Many home-owners were defaulting on mortgages and the economy was heading for a slow-down. By the mid-2008, the impacts of this wobble began spreading further and further, increasing in size as it went, until a tipping point was reached, and we witnessed century-old firms and commercial banks fall like dominoes in a row. Never would we have believed such institutions could be so vulnerable if we had not seen it with our own eyes.

But they were, they are, and they did collapse. And if they are not carefully supported and strengthened they will merely topple in the wind again.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this exact same scenario is occurring in the natural world. According to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment—a study conducted over four years by more than 1,395 experts from over 95 countries—the pressures on the planet's natural functions caused by human activity, have reached such a high level that the ability of ecosystems to satisfy the needs of future generations has been seriously, and perhaps irreversibly, compromised. Impacts on the natural functions of our planet have never been so destructive as they have been in the last 50 years. During the last century, the extinction rate of species increased up to a thousand times the natural rate. Through our consumer society and unsustainable use of resources, we are pushing species of plants and animals to the brink. Just like in the financial world, where the breaking point came up very quickly and unexpectedly, conservation practitioners fear the same with biological diversity.

The Living Planet Index, recently published by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), indicates a 30 per cent decline since 1970 in nearly 5,000 measured populations of 1 686 species. The 2008 List of Endangered Species, published by IUCN, has listed 16,928 species as threatened, meaning their populations have declined dramatically and heading towards extinction if quick action is not taken. Seven per cent, or 1,192, of these species are being lost right here in the United States. Indeed the United States stands second only to Ecuador in terms of number of endangered species within a country. .

In the wake of the financial collapse, Governments around the world scrambled to create bail-out plans totalling trillions of dollars. But when a fringing coral reef, which provides food, protection from storms, and removes climate-change-causing carbon dioxide from the air, collapses, what government rushes in to bail out that intricate ecosystem and the thousands of human lives it supports? Yes, Governments do contribute to the conservation of biodiversity generally, but there is no real sense of urgency. And yet the collapses are truly a matter of life and death.

The commitment demonstrated by Governments in the wake of the financial collapse is urgently required if our planet is to be saved. According to the report *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity*, edited by Pavan Sukhdev, Managing Director in the Global Markets division of Deutsche Bank, current estimates of global expenditure on biodiversity conservation sits at only US\$ 10-12 billion annually--a mere drop in the bucket for the precious network that sustains all life on Earth.

In so many ways, coral reefs, tropical rain forests, coastal wetlands, and all of the other ecosystems and plants and animals within them that make up our diverse planet, are far more

valuable than any Wall Street institution. Thanks to the Catskills in northern New York State, New York City has high quality water for its residents. Thanks to coral reefs down by the Florida Keys, thousands of citizens get natural protection from storm surges. Thanks to the pollination service provided by wild bees, fruit growers in California see millions of dollars in revenue each year. And, of course, thanks to countless other plants and animals we have the drugs needed to fight the many diseases and ailments that hit humans—cancer being just one of many.

The millions of species that share this planet with us, and their intricate interactions, which provide us with all the bare necessities of life, such as food, clean water and air, shelter, disease mitigation, temperature regulation, and so on, are truly the foundation of all life and activities on Earth. Without biodiversity, Wall Street has nothing to base itself upon.

This, Ladies and Gentlemen, is why heads of State and Government in 1992 created the Convention on Biological Diversity: to conserve biodiversity, promote the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources.

This is why Heads of State and Government at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 adopted the 2010 biodiversity target of significantly reducing the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on Earth. The deadline for meeting that target is only two years away.

This is why the Convention on Biological Diversity needs all countries around the world to increase their efforts to conserve global biodiversity. Species of plants and animals do not adhere to human-drawn borders, and neither do the benefits they provide humans. What is lost in one country is lost to the world.

I am happy to note that leaders around the world are recognizing the severe implications of biodiversity loss. At the last two G-8 summits, hosts Germany and Japan ensured that biodiversity loss was on the agenda. This has resulted in the “Potsdam Initiative –Biological Diversity 2010” and the Kobe Call for Action for Biodiversity, which highlight the G-8 commitment to increase their efforts to achieve the globally agreed 2010 biodiversity target.

Yet, this is just the beginning. We need to start planning for beyond 2010. The enormity of the issues and tasks at hand are undeniable. There is nothing I would like more than to see the United States of America assume an integral place in this historic process as a Party to the Convention on Biological Diversity sometime in 2009.

I am proud to say that the Convention I represent is the one of the most broadly subscribed to multilateral treaties in the world—it has 191 Parties. Of the 192 Members of the United Nations, 188 are party to the Convention. Of the four other Member States, two have recently committed themselves to joining in the near future. I am proud to say that, in my past two years as Executive Secretary of the Convention, I have helped to increase the number of member countries by bringing on board Brunei Darussalam, which is now a fully fledged Party, as well as Andorra and Iraq, which will soon be so. But my work is not yet finished. I will not be satisfied until the Convention achieves universal membership. The two hold-outs are Somalia and you, the United States of America.

As your President-elect Barack Obama has highlighted so clearly, it is time for change—but not just in the United States. Change is needed around the world. James Leape, Director-General of WWF International, recently pointed-out that: “Just as reckless spending is causing recession, so reckless consumption is depleting the world’s natural capital to a point where we are endangering our future prosperity.” Consideration for the natural world must be a part of this change. While the economic powers that be reshape financial markets, I encourage you to push for greater consideration of the natural world as a cornerstone of the world’s economic system. Only then will the world avoid further collapses such as the one we witness just a few short weeks ago. It is up to each and every one of us to alter this path through every means available.

And I hope that you, the United States of America, will be willing to share your renewed spirit and winds of change with the international community by joining the Convention on Biological Diversity and working hand-in-hand with the 190 countries that map out global policy and concerted actions on conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

As Theodore Roosevelt, your 26<sup>th</sup> President, once said, “The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased, and not impaired in value.” Based on this, we must admit that very few countries have been behaving well. It is time for change, not only for the sake of future generations, but to ensure economic stability and well-being now. Together, “Yes we can!”

Thank you for your kind attention