



# Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity



## Message from the Executive Secretary

**Dr. Ahmed Djoghlaif**

### To the International Mountain Biodiversity Conference On

### “Biodiversity Conservation and Management for Enhanced Ecosystem Services: Responding to the Challenges of Global Change”

**International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)  
Kathmandu, Nepal, 16-18 November 2008**

Mr. Andreas Schild, Director General, ICIMOD and distinguished participants,

It is an honour and a privilege to be able to address this important meeting.

I would like to convey my warm-hearted congratulations to ICIMOD for organizing this important international conference, and my sincere apologies for not being able to join this conference due to other commitments.

The aim of this international conference “biodiversity conservation and management for enhanced ecosystem services and responding to challenges of global change” resonates strongly with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) as we continue to promote the role of biodiversity in the delivery of ecosystem services in order to sustain and improve human well-being.

Mountain systems, covering about 27 per cent of the world’s land surface and directly supporting 22 per cent of the world’s people, are the water towers of the world, providing for the freshwater needs of more than half of humanity. The world’s mountains encompass some of the most spectacular landscapes, a wide variety of ecosystems, a great diversity of species, and distinctive human communities. The world’s principal biome types—from hyper-arid hot desert and tropical forest to arid polar icecaps—all occur in mountains. Mountains support about one quarter of the world’s terrestrial biological diversity, with nearly half of the world’s biodiversity “hotspots” concentrated in mountains. Almost every area that is jointly important for plants, amphibians, and endemic birds is located within mountains. Of the 20 plant species that supply 80 per cent of the world’s food, six species (maize, potatoes, barley, sorghum, tomatoes, and apples) originated in mountains. A large portion of domestic mammals—sheep, goats, yak, llama, and alpaca—originated in mountain regions. Genetic diversity tends to be higher in mountains associated with cultural diversity and extreme variation in local environmental conditions.

However, mountains are vulnerable to a host of natural and anthropogenic threats, including seismic hazards, fire, climate change, land cover change and agricultural intensification, infrastructure development, and armed conflict. These pressures degrade mountain environments and affect the provision of ecosystem services and the livelihoods of people dependent upon them. The fragility of mountain ecosystems represents a considerable challenge to sustainable development, as the impacts of



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unsuitable development are particularly intense, more rapid and more difficult to correct than in other ecosystems.

In response, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted the programme of work on mountain biological diversity in 2004, as a set of actions addressing characteristics and problems that are specific to mountain ecosystems. The programme of work aims to conserve mountain biological diversity and maintain the goods and services of mountain ecosystems, and to contribute to poverty alleviation and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Underlying the goals of the programme of work is the belief that sustainability will be achieved in mountain areas by reducing poverty, inequality, and marginality, preventing deterioration of natural resources and environments, and by improving the capabilities of institutions and organizations to promote the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.

The melting glaciers, the shifting of natural habitats, and the retreat and sometimes disappearance of species are stark reminders of the vulnerability of mountains ecosystems to rising temperature and precipitation changes. Activities that link upland and lowland management strategies can provide adaptation options. These options *inter alia* include mountain watershed management, establishment of both horizontal and vertical connectivity migration corridors, rehabilitation of degraded ecosystems, avoiding deforestation, and reducing human pressure on biodiversity. The CBD programme of work on mountain biological diversity provides for such adaptation options and its effective implementation is of paramount importance to minimize the adverse effects of climate change on mountain ecosystems.

Achieving environmental and human sustainability in mountains means finding ways to manage mountain resources and systems so that they can provide critical ecosystem services. There are win-win opportunities in this arena to not only protect mountain ecosystems and the biodiversity they harbour – but to use these more proactively and wisely to contribute significantly to meeting multiple human development challenges in the face of a rapidly changing world.

The United Nations General Assembly has designated 2010 as the United Nations International Year of Biodiversity. I cordially invite all governments and organizations present to commence preparations for this important event. In the same year the Government of Japan will host the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the CBD. In this meeting the COP will undertake an in-depth review of the progress made in the implementation of the mountain biological diversity programme of work. Prior to the tenth meeting of the COP, the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) at its 14th meeting scheduled to be held in May 2010 will consider the progress made in the implementation of the programme of work on mountain biological diversity.

These milestones present the opportunities to not only reflect on what we have achieved in relation to the 2010 target but more importantly to set out our vision and goals for the future. In this process the contributions of ICIMOD and the galaxy of international organizations such as Global Mountain Biodiversity Assessment, Mountain Partnership, Mountain Forum, and the Mountain Research Initiative have been and will be critical. All of you are true partners in the fullest sense. We have the opportunity to showcase how well we have worked together and lay down our road map beyond 2010. I have no doubts that this will be achieved and that together we can set the bar even higher for collaboration towards our shared vision.

I wish you a successful meeting and assure you of my strongest commitment to our partnership.

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