



Secretariat of the  
**Convention on Biological Diversity**



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DIVERSITY  
**22 May 2008**  
**BIODIVERSITY  
AND AGRICULTURE**

**STATEMENT BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**

**DR. AHMED DJOGLAF**

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*on the theme*

**BIODIVERSITY IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD**

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is an unprecedented event. I am not sure if there has ever been such an amazing collection of great American scientists, ambassadors, writers, thinkers and individuals coming together in their common concern for biodiversity. The American brain trust on biodiversity is with us here this week.

My congratulations to the National Council for Science and Environment (NCSE), its President, Ambassador Richard Benedict, and the entire staff for organizing this event. It is hard for me to describe how excited I am to be here in Washington with you this morning and how grateful I am to the NCSE for inviting me. I must say the timing of this Conference is not a moment too soon.

This is an unprecedented event as it is the first time that Mr. Thomas Friedman has made a presentation to a biodiversity gathering. I would like to thank Mr. Thomas Friedman.

Tom, your talk was a call to action.

I agree with what you write in your book: at one point, biodiversity slipped off the international community's radar screen. However, things have changed. Your presence with us this morning is a demonstration that this is no longer the case. Our meeting today clearly demonstrates, that biodiversity is back on the global agenda. Once again, my heartfelt gratitude for your unique contribution in raising public awareness in the United States and in the world on the biodiversity challenges facing mankind.

Biodiversity is back on the agenda including at the level of Heads of State. It was on the agenda of the G8 Heiligendamm and Hokkaido Summits. It was the focus of the Bonn Biodiversity Summit held in May this year with participation of Heads of State and Government. It will be the centre of attention of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2010. It will be at the core of the Nagoya Biodiversity Summit in October 2010. And it will be in the mind and heart of every citizen of our planet at the occasion of the celebration of the International Year of Biodiversity in 2010.

And while I agree with you that we need a million Noahs and a million arks to tackle biodiversity loss, there is also a compelling need for a common global approach.

Tom, you stated that "bringing people together, you bring the Earth together". This is indeed what the Convention on Biological Diversity is all about. The world you talk about in your book is the world the CBD works in, and with, on a daily basis—and has done so for last 15 years.

Meeting here at the Ronald Reagan building reminds me that the Convention on Biological Diversity was initiated through United States leadership 21 years ago when, back in 1987, the Reagan Administration asked the United Nations Environment Programme to consider the need for a comprehensive global international convention to address biodiversity loss.

The Convention is the world's only forum that addresses the variety of life on Earth in its entirety, including all it has to offer to human well-being: from the functional to the spiritual. It sets agreed standards, norms, and guidelines for biodiversity conservation, sustainable use, and access to genetic resources and the sharing of benefits from their use. Its member countries can then adapt these standards to their own national circumstances. Because of the nature of the issue, biodiversity loss is global in scale, and a global approach is needed while maintaining the flexibility for each country to determine how it wants to move forward.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Convention on Biological Diversity is NOT about locking species away to protect them from human beings. It is about using nature to meet our needs and wants, while making sure species have enough numbers left over and enough time to regenerate. It is about ensuring we have a diverse portfolio to keep us afloat in, and allow us to adapt to, changing conditions—such as the inevitable yet unpredictable impacts of climate change. It is about working with civil society, business, international organizations, academia, research communities, indigenous and local communities, and some 192 Governments around the world to establish a solid platform for common action worldwide.

The Convention is not stagnant but is constantly evolving.

In 15 years, the Convention has grown from a simple legal text, to a thriving and vibrant forum for international action on biodiversity conservation. Through the Convention, the international community has initiated 24 work programmes, coordinated by a small but committed Secretariat located in Montreal, Canada, and hosted by the United Nations Environment Programme. This Secretariat helps Parties to implement their commitments and assists in catalysing action on the ground for those in need of technical and financial assistance.

The Convention's financial mechanism, operated by the Global Environment Facility (GEF)—based here in Washington—has enabled action in 155 countries to safeguard biodiversity through projects funded with some \$2.7 billion in grants and an additional \$7.5 billion in leveraged funding.

It has also supported the work of communities in 101 countries through small grants to around 6,000 biodiversity projects. You should be proud to know that the United States is one of the major contributors to the GEF.

The CBD is on the cutting edge of emerging biodiversity issues, such as biodiversity and agriculture (including pollinators, soils, nutrition, and food security), the relationship of biodiversity with sustainable cities, business and biodiversity, and, of course, the role of biodiversity in mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change. Through its scientific body, the CBD underpins all of this work with science.

Moreover, the CBD has been deeply involved with enabling safe application and benefits of biotechnology. The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, with 153 Parties, provides an international legal framework to enable safe use and international movement of living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology.

In addition, the Parties will finalize, no later than October 2010, an international framework for access to genetic resources and benefit-sharing. Such a framework would make a distinct impact in promoting innovative approaches to create economic incentives for conservation and sustainable use, thus contributing to achieving sustainable development and the Millennium Development Goals.

But we are missing the United States of America.

President Clinton signed the Convention in 1993 and transmitted it to the Senate. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee favourably reported on the Convention to the Senate floor in 1994 with a strong and bipartisan vote of 16-3. No vote was taken on ratification and the treaty still awaits Senate action.

The world eagerly awaits a decision on American ratification of the Convention on Life on Earth.

The Convention is the perfect forum for the United States to show its concern for the state of the world's biodiversity—to demonstrate its leadership, to innovate, to inspire, and to share its experience on the issue, something that dates back to the creation of Yellowstone National Park 136 years ago. Something exemplified in that question posed by the United States delegation to the UNEP Governing Council over twenty years ago.

On the issue of climate change, President-elect Barack Obama has already demonstrated leadership. His meeting today in Chicago with the Al Gore on environmental policy and climate change is another demonstration of his leadership. I would like to take this opportunity to associate myself with the words of Mr. Achim Steiner, the Executive Director of UNEP, who congratulated the President-elect for his statement on climate change. He stated that Mr. Obama's expression of commitment, and I quote, "is very meaningful not only for climate change. It is also a signal that, in spite of—or rather because of—the current financial crisis, a greener economic policy is finding new momentum."

However, we cannot forget that biodiversity conservation is part of the solution to climate change. Deforestation accounts for 20 per cent of global greenhouse-gas emissions, while scientists estimate that forests harbour between 50 to 90 per cent of all terrestrial species.

Tom, you wrote, and I quote: "I continue to hold the belief that many large-scale bad things happen in the world without American leadership, but few large-scale good things happen without American leadership." This applies to climate change but also to biodiversity. Indeed, the CBD needs the United States of America and, in turn, Tom, in our "hot, flat, and crowded world" that you describe, I would even dare to propose that the United States needs the Convention on Biological Diversity.

When it comes to protecting life on Earth not a single country, not a single responsible citizen of this planet, can afford to sit on the sidelines and act as an observer.

Only with America's active participation and leadership at the table can the world take a truly universal approach to biodiversity loss and climate change—the defining issues of our time.

Twenty-one years have past since the United States posed a simple question to the United Nations Environment Programme: Do we need a treaty on biodiversity?

The answer was yes.

The international community, including the United States, delivered it.

And 15 years later, the time really has come to ask another question: Do we need the United States to join the Convention on Biological Diversity? In the coming months the American people and their elected representatives need to respond to this question.

Does the international community need the United States as a party? The United Nations General Assembly and the Conference of the Parties have already and consistently responded "yes" to this question. In fact, this issue was discussed at the meeting of the Bureau of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, held in Berlin, last month, under the leadership of Germany. As a result, I am very pleased to convey to you the greetings and best wishes of Mr Jochen Flasbarth, the Chairman of the Bureau, who has decided to pay a visit to Washington, D.C. in February 2009 to initiate a dialogue with key stakeholders in the United States in the hope of welcoming your country as a Party to the Convention at the Nagoya Biodiversity Summit to be held in October 2010.

A Convention on Biological Diversity with universal membership is essential in meeting the unprecedented biodiversity challenges for the benefit of life on Earth. We owe it to ourselves. We owe it especially to our children.

To paraphrase you, Tom: There is no later. Later is now. The world cannot wait any longer. We must act now. Indeed we must act *together*. Acting together can be the only way forward.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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