



Secretariat of the
Convention on Biological Diversity



STATEMENT BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

MR. AHMED DJOGHLAF

on the occasion of

THE UNEP INFORMAL STRATEGIC CONSULTATION

on

**SUSTAINABILITY BEYOND 2010:
PERSPECTIVES FROM EXPERIENCES**

Nairobi, 15 February 2009



“To achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of 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.”

Dear colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Seven years ago, we made this promise to ourselves, to nature, to the world. And yet, we receive increasingly strong signals of distress from the natural systems that provide the services that sustain our daily needs and livelihoods. We see increasingly strong indications that the poorest among us, those who have no recourse to manufactured alternatives to what the natural world provides, are struggling harder and harder to draw the bare necessities from the ecosystems their communities have relied on for centuries.

I use the word “we” deliberately here. Governments, Parties, industries. NGOs. conventions. These are vague terms that allow us to shift responsibility away from ourselves. We are the individuals that make up those institutions. We are the individuals who make demands on the natural world. We are the individuals causing biodiversity loss and the incumbent impacts. We are the individuals who need to own up to our responsibility and take concrete steps to alter this destructive path we are on. And this is the forum where frank discussion on how to achieve this must occur.

We need only read the daily headlines to know where we stand on road to the 2010 biodiversity target. Landslides because deforestation has left hillsides unstable under excess rain. Coastal destruction from sea storms because protective mangroves and coral reefs have been severely degrade. Outbreaks of water-borne diseases because the natural filtration capacity of land has been transformed. Increased malnutrition because of declines in coastal fisheries due overfishing or alternatively declines in harvest because water is misappropriated.

With just 320 days to go until 1 January 2010, I must unfortunately admit that these headlines will not suddenly be transformed into positive ones. On 1 January 2010, we will not be able to say that we significantly reduced the rate of biodiversity loss. And that is why we must, today, seriously consider the post-2010 target that needs to be set.

While we cannot declare 100 per cent success in our efforts over the past seven years, we should take pride in the advances that have been achieved and draw on these to continue moving forward. The biodiversity targets agreed in 2002 have provided an impetus for a serious look at the consequences of our activities on the living environment. They have rallied and stimulated many actors to commit themselves to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the utilization of genetic resources.

Even the most unexpected actors, such as cities and business communities, have begun to think hard how the true value of biodiversity and how the services provided by ecosystems can be reflected in our economy. We need to tap into this and run with it.

The commitments represented in the targets to be agreed upon at tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties should be commensurate with the challenge at hand and based both on the best science available and on the experience of countries in implementing the Convention to date. Perhaps we should even consider both short- and long-term targets, for 2020 and 2050, that set out the vision of the international community for addressing the biodiversity crisis.

Of course, Governments must give the institutions working in their countries the mandate to integrate biodiversity considerations into their daily activities, but in many cases, once Governments have committed to biodiversity conservation, actions need to be bottom-up. Biodiversity loss is a very local event, yet its drivers are global. For example, demands for imported goods in the developed world drives habitat destruction in other places, affecting local communities' ability to meet their basic needs. Consumers, you and I and every other citizen on this planet, need to become more aware of the impacts of their demands and adjust them accordingly. At the end of the day, what is lost in one country is lost to the world.

We need buy in at all levels: community, city, provincial, national, regional, global. Business also needs to be on board – it is one of our best allies in using biodiversity better. The business case for improved biodiversity management is becoming increasingly clear and there is growing recognition of this by business itself. Moreover, we need consistency. Often biodiversity considerations fall under more than one ministry in government. We need consensus across government ministries on the national game-plan for biodiversity so that stakeholders are getting the same message from all divisions of government and can act accordingly.

Therefore, while the targets must be international, they must also provide an effective framework for the establishment of meaningful national- and local-level commitments. Moreover, the accompanying strategic plan must outline the way the targets are to be achieved at each level and across sectors, as well as include a robust system of monitoring and evaluation.

What each of us know intuitively, but must somehow ensure it is embedded in the targets and taken up by all stakeholders, is that biodiversity loss is not a stand-alone problem in and of itself. It cannot be tackled through siloed initiatives that merely target species lost as an issue separate from poverty, climate change, water scarcity, growth in demand, development, conflict, and the many other challenges that face our world. The fact of the matter is that not a single one of these problems can be addressed on its own. Biodiversity is the foundation of all life on Earth and all activities. Hence, mainstreaming is the key – and will help alleviate the many other global challenges we are facing. The importance of combining and synergizing efforts rather than expending energy on discreet projects was emphasized when the 2010 biodiversity target was integrated into the Millennium Development Goals. We must carry this forward into the post-2010 targets.

In this regard, we need to find a mechanism able to “translate” the language of biodiversity specialists into the language commonly understood by decision makers. The concept of ecosystem goods and services, which focuses on people-nature interactions and the role of stakeholders in identifying and valuing potential impacts on biodiversity, has to be promoted in order to progressively shift from a conservation approach to a human well-being perspective. Such a shift will force us to take ownership of actions and their impacts on our future.

It is now time to engage in concrete work with multilateral and bilateral donor organizations to mainstream biological diversity and its associated ecosystem services into the plans that are being laid-out to tackle the many global challenges and which are encapsulated by the Millennium Development Goals. It is time to ensure those efforts are linked with the Convention's work programmes. It is time to ensure that change becomes a reality. This goal was laid out by the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and one that we need to remind ourselves of.

With this in mind, the year 2010, the International Year of Biodiversity, provides us not only the opportunity but the obligation to decisively turn the wheel. We have a duty to see beyond our private interests and need to create a grand coalition of nations and organizations and private-sector and civil-society groups that are committed to maintain a healthy planet for the future of humanity. We need to enable economic production and trade that is environmentally friendly. We need to make sustainable production competitive. And yes, we need to make all efforts to reduce our own individual consumption of the many things that contribute to the degradation of our planet.

We increasingly understand that biodiversity loss jeopardizes our striving for sustainable development. We are beginning to see that business as usual will lead to extremely dangerous modifications of our natural environment, with unthinkable social consequences. We are cognizant of the fact that we have to break out of the downward spiral of biodiversity loss fueled by unsustainable resource use and leading to increasing poverty in biodiversity-dependent communities. But how do we move beyond paying lip-service to the problems and finally put this into action? How do we bring about concrete, long-lasting change?

2010 will be a decisive year, certainly for the Convention on Biological Diversity, but also for life on Earth as we know it. Biodiversity is our safety net; it is our key to coping with change and mitigating what we have instigated but can no longer halt. Through our use of biodiversity, we control whether the planet improves in the coming decades or whether it undergoes increasingly dramatic changes and deteriorates further into a less and less accommodating place.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Where have we failed?

How can we enable the productive sectors to include biodiversity in the portfolio of activities aimed at sustainable production?

How can Governments put in place biodiversity-friendly regulations without infringing on the competitiveness of their industries and the range of international agreements they adhere to?

And how can the United Nations system encourage and support a fair future for all countries and their citizens?

Dear Bakary,

As you see, I am coming with many questions. And I know in this room many of us have similar thoughts. I sincerely want to thank you for organizing this meeting today. I know you have many commitments and responsibilities in these coming days and therefore want to thank you particularly for your leadership in bringing us together to discuss freely how we can jointly keep afloat the boat of which humanity has taken command on behalf of all fellow organisms on Earth.

From my perspective, I know that my staff, as dedicated and hard-working as they are, cannot achieve the tremendous challenges before us with the Secretariat's limited budget that thwarts us from bringing on new talent and energy. I know that too often my Secretariat feels a sense of despair as there are simply not enough hours in the day to achieve all that must be done with such a small staff.

Colleagues,

This is not a time for petty turf wars, for blindly pursuing vested interests. It is a time for designing the grand coalition, the spirit of multi-partisanship, that will help us stay clear of the cliffs and hurricanes that threaten to sink us all together.

Thank you for your attention.