



Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity



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MESSAGE
FROM
AHMED DJOGLAF,
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY,
ON THE OCCASION OF
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY
8 March 2009

International Women's Day is a day rooted in the centuries-old struggle of women to participate in society on an equal footing with men, and a day for women and men alike to recognize women's struggles, achievements, collective power and the challenges they continue to tackle. It is a day of inspiration and celebration of women's lives. It connects women from all walks of life in all parts of the world.

As we celebrate this day, a very important meeting is coming to a close: the International Colloquium on Women's Empowerment, Leadership Development, International Peace and Security. The two-day Colloquium co-convened by President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia and President Tarja Halonen of Finland is being held in Monrovia, Liberia.

On 31 October 2000, the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security to ensure that women are protected from the worst abuses in times of conflict and to empower them to play their rightful and vital role in helping their countries prevent, end and recover from conflict. With a view to realizing the goals of the aforementioned Security Council resolution, the Colloquium aims to empower women to be more effective leaders by linking with their peers from around the world and sharing and implementing best practices on economic empowerment, climate-change adaptation and mitigation and sustainable development.

Goal 4 of the Colloquium is to "demonstrate the clear gender dimensions of climate change, environment protection and sustainable development". As major stakeholders in the Convention on Biological Diversity, women have a special relation with nature in general and biodiversity in particular. In most countries, the survival of women, their well-being and empowerment depend on biodiversity. For women in developing countries, particularly in the least developed countries, biodiversity is vital for their survival and that of their families. Biodiversity is also part and parcel of their belief systems and their cultural and spiritual values. It is for these reasons that the preamble of the Convention on Biological Diversity recognizes "the vital role that women play in the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity" and affirms "the need for the full participation of women at all levels of policy-making and implementation for biological diversity conservation".

The Convention is strongly committed to recognizing and promoting the integral yet distinct roles that women and men play in conserving, celebrating and sharing biodiversity. The Convention further recognizes that women, and distinct groups of women, require special consideration because of institutionalized systems that marginalize women and do not explicitly value women's contributions to biodiversity.

As recognized in Millennium Development Goal 7, biodiversity is important for the well-being of all humans on the planet, now and in the future. Without such diversity we would all be poorer, in

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economic, social and cultural terms. Because the current rate of loss of biodiversity is severe, we risk exacerbating the detrimental impacts of climate change, initiating further conflicts over limited natural resources and accelerating widespread poverty. The causes and impacts of biodiversity loss are gendered, and should be treated as such. Moreover, these impacts will be felt most acutely by today's youth and tomorrow's leaders.

As the Colloquium draws to a close on this very important day, it is our hope that the leaders and participants will draw from their experiences and will leave Liberia with a thorough understanding of gender-sensitive approaches to biodiversity and climate change issues, and how such approaches achieve results superior to gender-blind ones.

Women leaders must pave the way in promoting opportunities for youth, and especially girls and young women, to actively participate in decision-making processes on biodiversity and climate-change issues, and in doing so, strengthen the gender dimensions of local, national and international biodiversity initiatives and highlight the important role of women and biodiversity towards the celebrations in 2010, which has been declared the International Year of Biodiversity by the United Nations General Assembly.

I wish all women of the world a memorable celebration of this International Women's Day.

Montreal, 8 March 2009