



Convention on  
Biological Diversity



INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR  
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

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INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES

**STATEMENT BY**  
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**CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

**ON THE OCCASION OF**

**THE G8 ENVIRONMENT MINISTERS MEETING**

**OPENING WORKING SESSION ON BIODIVERSITY**

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Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr Ban Ki-moon, considers 2009 as the year on climate. Last week he announced that a high-level segment of the United Nations General Assembly devoted to climate change will be convened on 22 September. In December the world leaders will have to meet the challenge of agreeing on a post-Kyoto climate regime. 2010 has been declared as the International Year on Biodiversity and will coincide with the convening in September of a high-level segment of the United Nations General Assembly devoted to biodiversity, which will be followed by the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 10) in October in Nagoya, Japan.

In 2011 the international community will celebrate the International Year on Forests. 2012 will mark the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the Rio Summit and the opening of signature of the Convention on Biological Diversity. These successive events are not a mere coincidence of the calendar. They remind us of the inter-linkages between climate change, biodiversity, forests and sustainable development. This is why they are on your agenda today as Ministers of the Environment of the G8 meeting here in Siracusa. I would like, therefore, to convey to you, Excellency Ms Stefania Prestigiacomo, my deep gratitude for elevating biodiversity issues to the top of the agenda of this meeting and for the invitation extended to me to attend this historical meeting in this historical venue of the Castello Maniace.

Once upon a time when Italy was not yet a country and the Ancient Greek Empire extended to this area, Marcus Tullius Cicero described Siracusa as, “the greatest Greek city and the most beautiful of them all.” I am certain that we all agree that this holds true for today’s Italian city of Siracusa, listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. The deciding committee highlighted that this decision was made because the Ancient Syracuse was “directly linked to events, ideas and literary works of outstanding universal significance.” Your meeting here, as the G8 with your eleven partners, is of tremendous political significance and in line with the tradition of this historical city. The “Carta di Siracusa” on Biodiversity, which is before you and submitted at the initiative of our host, carries this same importance.

Cicero also said, “Nature has planted in our minds an insatiable longing to see the truth”. To see the truth is to recognize that while *Homo sapiens* have been altering the planet since their appearance, the destruction we have imposed on our world in the past fifty years is greater than at any time in the history of humankind. The impacts of this are finally coming to the fore: species are disappearing at a rate of up to 1000 times the natural one; ecosystems such mangroves and coral reefs are breaking down reducing our protection from natural disasters; natural resources are being overused and things that we have long taken for granted, such as clean water, are becoming more and more scarce. As the unprecedented financial and economic crises of modern times continue to unfold, we must remember that the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment identifies the loss of ecosystem services as being a major barrier to the achievement of reduction of poverty, hunger and disease.

Cicero however can also be quoted as saying, “Any man is liable to err, only a fool persists in error.” And I believe we will also agree that this is the primary reason that we here today. This forum indeed has a moral responsibility to lead by example and provide much needed leadership in achieving positive change. I would like therefore, as the head of the Secretariat of the unique legal instrument that we call the Convention for Life on Earth, to tell

you how grateful I am that you are addressing biodiversity as an essential part of the G8 dialogue at both the level of Ministers and Heads of State. The “Potsdam Initiative” and the “Kobe Call for Action for Biodiversity” have indeed established a solid tradition. The importance of the 2010 biodiversity target was reiterated at the Heiligendamm and Hokkaido Toyako G8 Summits.

The “Carta di Siracusa” on Biodiversity provides an outline for the way ahead in addressing in the coming years the unprecedented biodiversity challenges we are causing and experiencing. This achievement reflects the new enhanced phase of the implementation of the three objectives of the Convention under the leadership of the triple presidency of the Conference of the Parties.

I would like therefore to pay tribute to Brazil, Germany and Japan for their leadership. The enhanced phase of implementation was born in Curitiba. The enhanced phase of commitment was born in Bonn. And in Nagoya, in October 2010, the biodiversity family will assess progress achieved on the 2010 biodiversity target as well as shape the post 2010 biodiversity agenda. The 192 Parties to the Convention will introduce a new biodiversity target and a revised Strategic Plan of the Convention.

The year 2010 also is significant for biodiversity in another way. It will be the year that the world celebrates the International Year of Biodiversity. This 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. As Her Excellency the Minister of the Environment, Land and Sea of Italy stated, “We need a new behavior;” we need a new relation between man and nature. The International year will be inaugurated in Berlin and it will be followed on 21-22 January by a High-Level celebration by UNESCO. The Heads of State and Government attending the sixty-fifth session of the United Nations General Assembly will mark this event in September 2010, and in Nagoya in October, the 192 Parties to our Convention will celebrate this event by adopting an International Regime on Access and Benefit Sharing. The closing ceremony which will also coincide with the launch the 2011 International Year on Forests will take place in December in the Ishikawa Prefecture of Japan.

Indeed, 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.

As, Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon highlighted a few months ago at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland:

“We live in a new era. Its challenges can all be solved by cooperation and only cooperation. Our times demand a new definition of leadership—global leadership. They demand a new constellation of international cooperation: governments, civil society and the private sector, working together for a collective global good.”

International cooperation is key to overcoming the global hurdles facing us today.

Archimedes, who is said to have visited Syracuse often, once claimed: “Give me a lever long enough, and a prop strong enough, and I can move the world.” I fully believe that by working together, all stakeholders, all governments, we can fashion a lever long enough, and form a prop strong enough, such that we can move the world -- we can change the way we interact with nature so as to reduce our detrimental impacts and secure our own well-being in a sustainable manner.

I thank you for your kind attention.

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