



Convention on
Biological Diversity



INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

22 MAY 2009

INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES

STATEMENT BY
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CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

ON THE OCCASION OF

**THE 2009 INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR BIOLOGICAL
DIVERSITY**

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Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Matsuo Basho, one of Japan's most celebrated poets and an early master of the *haiku* form, loved the wilderness and found much inspiration in it. He once said: "There is nothing you can see that is not a flower; there is nothing you can think that is not the moon." This quotation elegantly expresses the interconnectedness of all things in the natural world.

The Japanese have long appreciated the importance of nature. Nowhere is this more reflected than in the ancient practice of *satoyama*. Local agricultural communities and villages have been at the heart of Japan's land-management techniques throughout much of its history, carefully preserving the forests that provided them with both wood and fertilizer in the form of leaves. Over time, *satoyama* has been applied to larger areas of forests, grasslands, streams and ponds, dry rice fields and rice paddies, and so has become a much praised model for the sustainable use of our biological resources. Biodiversity levels are high under *satoyama*, for underlying the practice is the recognition that we humans can live in harmony with our fellow species—and indeed that we *must*, as their presence ultimately sustains our existence and promotes our well-being.

It is simply not possible to have a stable, flourishing human society in a biologically impoverished world. Biodiversity is our ultimate source for innumerable goods, ranging from food to medicines to building materials. The ecosystems of the planet also provide us with so many irreplaceable services: air and water purification, soil replenishment, crop pollination, climate moderation, to name but a few.

And yet biodiversity is under a threat previously seen only during catastrophic mass extinctions. The current rate of species extinction as a result of human activity has been estimated to be up to 1,000 times higher than the natural rate. Last year's IUCN Red List revealed the 38 per cent of all the species examined are currently under threat of extinction. If current loss rates continue, it is expected that, across the planet, an area of 1.3 billion hectares—about one and a half times the size of the United States—will completely lose its original levels of biodiversity by 2050.

There are many drivers of biodiversity loss. Among the most prominent are overfishing, deforestation, forest fragmentation and degradation, pollution and climate change. Another important cause is the theme of today's Symposium on the International Day for Biological Diversity: invasive alien species. These are species taken from their natural habitats that invade other ecosystems, out-competing native species for food and other resources and often perturbing ecosystem balance and functioning in the process. Their spread has been greatly facilitated by the greater levels of trade, transport, travel and tourism that are a part of globalization.

Japan is no stranger to problems with alien invasive species. As we speak, largemouth bass and bluegills, which originated in North America, are rapidly consuming your native fish and insects and threatening them with extinction. The mosquitofish, also from North America, is directly competing with the threatened Japanese rice fish, with a decrease in habitat enhancing the prospect of the rice fish being driven to extinction. Japan has established a fundamental policy on invasive alien species based on legislation that was put into effect in 2005, which includes a mandate to measure the extent of their spread.

Is the legislation effective enough? At a broader level, it is essential to note that the drivers of biodiversity loss often operate synergistically, interacting with each other to increase the rate at which species are disappearing. For example, the spread of invasive alien species is facilitated by climate change: in any given region, changes in local climatic conditions can make it more suitable for the establishment and spread of alien invasive species and associated diseases. A recent scientific study has suggested that this might be the case with the infectious disease Chytridiomycosis, carried by invasive species, which has been decimating amphibian populations across the planet.

Given the interactions between the causes of biodiversity loss and the magnitude of the threat they pose, it is important to frame today's celebrations as part of the larger picture. The 2009 International Day for Biological Diversity in, with its theme of invasive alien species, gives us a chance to raise awareness about the problems they create. But it also gives us the opportunity to remind everyone of the general international efforts to slow the rate of biodiversity loss, and to encourage them to join in.

Leading these efforts is the Convention on Biological Diversity, the main international institution dedicated to the preservation of biodiversity. It has three main objectives: to conserve biological

diversity; to ensure the sustainable use of biological resources; and to promote the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources. More generally, it aims to integrate biodiversity into the agenda of relevant international process by raising awareness that biodiversity loss is interconnected with a host of other important international issues. By engaging as many stakeholders as possible, it sets biodiversity preservation targets and develops road-maps for meeting them.

Over the past decade the Convention has raised significant awareness about the continuing depletion of our biological resources and fostered a broad-ranging commitment to addressing this serious problem. In 2002, at their meeting in The Hague, the Parties to the Convention set a target to significantly reduce the rate of biodiversity loss worldwide by 2010 as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on Earth. This 2010 biodiversity target was subsequently endorsed by the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development and the United Nations General Assembly and was incorporated as a new target under the Millennium Development Goals.

The enhanced phase of implementation of a biodiversity preservation strategy was initiated at eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, in Curitiba in 2006. Subsequently, the enhanced phase of commitment was born at the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in Bonn in 2008. At the same time, the G-8 environment ministers endorsed the Potsdam Initiative, the Kobe Call for Action for Biodiversity and the Carta di Siracusa on Biodiversity, helping to give biodiversity an unprecedented level of prominence at G-8 summits in Heiligendamm and Hokkaido/Toyako.

These international efforts will reach a high point in 2010, declared by the United Nations to be the International Year of Biodiversity. The International Year will be inaugurated in Berlin and it will be followed on 21-22 January by a high-level celebration by UNESCO. In September, for the first-time ever, Heads of State and Government attending the sixty-fifth session of the United Nations General Assembly will discuss the importance of biodiversity, as well as mark the year's events. Here in Japan in October, at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in Nagoya, the 192 Parties to our Convention are expected to celebrate the International Year by adopting an International Regime on Access and Benefit Sharing. The closing ceremony will coincide with the launch of the 2011 International Year on Forests, and will take place in December in Ishikawa Prefecture.

Part of next year's celebrations will be a continuation of the process already under way: raising awareness about the importance of biodiversity and what we can do to save it, with a focus on promoting innovative solutions. However, another key part of the celebrations will be an assessment of what we have accomplished so far, as well as a formulation of a post-2010 biodiversity agenda. In Nagoya, the Conference of the Parties is expected to agree on post-2010 short- and long-term biodiversity targets – potentially for 2020 and 2050 respectively – and to formalize a new Strategic Plan.

What will the post-2010 Strategic Plan look like? Based on the inputs we have received so far from various stakeholders, a few key components are likely:

Strong consideration should be given to formulating a quantitative biodiversity target, a concrete goal that stakeholders can strive to achieve. Such a goal should make it easier to communicate why it is important to preserve biodiversity and how to go about doing it.

In addition, the Plan should highlight that biodiversity is not the purview of the Convention alone. As biodiversity loss is interlinked with issues such as poverty, climate change, water scarcity, growth in demand, development, international conflict, among others, we need to expand the ownership of post-2010 biodiversity targets to other constituencies. Biodiversity must be mainstreamed into all economic sectors: organizations that are not typically concerned with biodiversity need to find elements that are relevant to their activities. The publication of the final phase of the ongoing study on the “The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB)”, led by Mr. Pavan Sukhdev, should facilitate this task.

The Plan should also establish a sound scientific basis for quantitative targets. Any target needs to be commensurate with the challenge we face, and based both on the best science available and the experience of countries in implementing the Convention to date. The third edition of Global Biodiversity Outlook—peer-reviewed within the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity, its scientific bodies and the scientific community at large—will provide an overview of the relevant science and experience, as well as a projection of future changes in biodiversity levels and possible response measures.

Finally, the new Strategic Plan should strive to facilitate and support national action. It is vital that countries critically evaluate how global targets and indicators apply to their particular situation. Only when countries individually go through their own processes and set targets at the national, provincial and municipal level can they ensure that biodiversity concerns are raised when legislative decisions are taken.

With excitement building for the International Year and the new Strategic Plan, what can Japan do as the host of Nagoya Biodiversity Summit? There are a number of things. First, you can follow your rich historical example and promote the *satoyama* initiative for the sustainable management of living natural resources. Secondly, you can engage the research community to promote strategic monitoring of biodiversity and the testing of innovative ideas and solutions. Thirdly, you can strive to make biodiversity information accessible to underpin the decision-making process at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. Fourthly, you can communicate the problem of biodiversity loss as widely as possible so as to involve all stakeholders in its conservation. And finally, you can organize and take part in the various events of the International Year of Biodiversity, including the events in Nagoya and Ishikawa.

Matsuo Basho famously said: “No matter where your interest lies, you will not be able to accomplish anything unless you bring your deepest devotion to it.” With the International Year of Biodiversity around the corner and the Nagoya meeting of the Conference of the Parties approaching quickly, we need to increase our efforts to preserve biodiversity and thereby make sure the well-being of future generations is not severely compromised.

Working together, there is much we can accomplish. Matsuo Basho wrote: “Summer rain softly falls. The water fast flows into the great stream of Mogami River.” Echoing Basho one last time, I would like to suggest that individuals who fight to conserve biodiversity are like the soft rain he speaks of. When every drop of this rain is accumulated, it will create a dramatic change in the world with a power like the great Mogami as it flows into the ocean.

Thank you for your kind attention.