



Message by Ahmed Djoghlaif
Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity

on the occasion of

World Oceans Day

“Our Oceans, Our Responsibility”

8 June 2009

Oceans have been an area where human responsibility is least practised. Sir Arthur C. Clarke once reminded humanity of the importance of ocean, saying, “*How inappropriate to call this planet Earth when it is quite clearly Ocean*”. Although it may be needless to repeat that the oceans cover 70 per cent of our planet’s surface, many would not know that the oceans represent over 95 per cent of the biosphere. They contain a vast diversity of different habitat types and spectacular seascapes, hosting 32 of the 34 animal phyla of the planet, of which around 13 are exclusively or mostly marine.

In view of the importance of the oceans as the very basis of the planet’s overall sustainability, including the well-being of humanity, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity has been celebrating World Oceans Day even before its official designation by General Assembly of the United Nations. We therefore greatly welcome the recent decision of the General Assembly to designate 8 June as World Oceans Day from this year as it would surely strengthen the fulfilment of our overdue responsibilities.

UNEP recently predicted that as much as 91 per cent of all temperate and tropical coasts would be heavily impacted by human development by 2050, and that these impacts would be further compounded by climate change induced sea level rise and increased frequency and intensity of natural hazards. Moreover, the increase of sea-water temperature would cause more frequent and severe coral bleaching events, and marine waters would become more acidic due to rising carbon-dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere.

Corals demonstrate a most unfortunate example of the effects of multiple stresses, as highlighted by recent studies. Corals are affected by both ocean acidification and by warming of ocean surface water leading to declining calcification and increase in bleaching. Compounded with other threats, either from climate change or from traditional



impacts such as destructive fishing, pollution, and invasive species, these threats cause corals to become more vulnerable and lose their resilience.

In the midst of the looming threats of climate change, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has also provided a worrisome report indicating rapid increase of dead marine zones (marine waters without enough oxygen), from 149 areas in 2003 to over 200 areas in 2006. Most of these dead marine zones are observed in coastal waters, which host important fishing grounds. The increasing outbreaks and infestation of invasive species, which are being accelerated by climate change, add additional stresses to marine biodiversity, fishery productivity and overall ecosystem health.

In contrast to rapidly worsening pressure to marine biodiversity, our efforts to address all these challenges are far from satisfactory. Presently, the world's oceans are seriously under-protected, with only approximately 0.8% of the oceans and 6% of territorial seas being within protected-area systems.

To address this huge gap in fulfilling our responsibilities, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, at its ninth meeting, in 2008, adopted scientific criteria for identifying ecologically or biologically significant marine areas in need of protection in open-ocean waters and deep-sea habitats. Parties also adopted scientific guidance for designing representative networks of marine protected areas. To further assist Parties in applying these scientific criteria, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity is convening an expert workshop on scientific and technical guidance on the use of biogeographic classification systems and identification of marine areas beyond national jurisdiction in need of protection, to be held in Ottawa from 29 September to 2 October 2009.

The recent Conference of the Parties to the Convention also raised concerns on the potential impacts of ocean acidification and direct human-induced ocean fertilization on marine biodiversity. The Secretariat of the Convention is currently collaborating with UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre in compiling and synthesizing relevant scientific information to address these concerns.

At its forthcoming tenth meeting, scheduled for October 2010, the Conference of the Parties will undertake an in-depth review of progress made in the implementation of programme of work on marine and coastal biodiversity over the past six years. The Secretariat has been collaborating with various partners to make this in-depth review a meaningful process, which can facilitate the renewal of the Parties' commitments to the Jakarta Mandate, increasing global awareness on increasing threats to marine biodiversity, and accelerating our efforts to address these threats and meet the 2010 biodiversity and the 2012 marine-protected-areas targets.

The theme for the 2009 World Oceans Day, "**Our Oceans, Our Responsibility**" highlights that **Oceans** cannot be managed by the efforts individual countries alone. Ensuring sustainability of **oceans** calls for **our** common commitments, cooperation and coordination. It also emphasizes that we share the **responsibility for healthy and productive oceans**.

The Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity therefore joins other United Nations organizations, international organizations, countries, and other civil society groups in expressing our firm commitments to **uphold our responsibility towards safeguarding our oceans**.
