



Convention on
Biological Diversity



STATEMENT

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CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

ON THE OCCASION OF

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Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentleman,

As Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, it is a great pleasure for me to be addressing the Canadian Environmental Network at this critical period in the campaign to preserve the world's biodiversity. Canadians have always been prominently involved in the environmental activities of the United Nations. Maurice Strong was Secretary-General of two of the three major United Nations meetings on the environment: the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, which launched the world environment movement, and the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, where the Convention was opened for signature. Mr. Strong was also the first Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), a position later held by Elizabeth Dowdeswell, which means that, of the five Executive Directors in the history of UNEP, two have been Canadian.

It should also be remembered that Canada was the first industrialized nation to ratify the Convention, setting a precedent for the rest of the developed world. Today the Convention is the leading international instrument dedicated to the preservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and has near universal membership. The Convention has come a long way over its seventeen-year history – but there is still a long way to go.

Because of human activities, biodiversity continues to be lost at an incredible rate – up to 1,000 times the natural background rate of extinction. Last year's IUCN Red List showed that 38 per cent of all species examined worldwide are threatened with extinction. If we cannot reverse these trends, an area of 1,300 million ha worldwide – about 1.5 times the area of the United States – will completely lose its original levels of biodiversity by 2050.

As such, continued Canadian support will be essential in the years to come. As you all know, Canadians have a vested interest in safeguarding biodiversity. This country is home to almost 20 per cent of the world's wilderness, 20 per cent of its freshwater, 24 per cent of its wetlands and 10 per cent of its forests. It has a wide variety of ecosystems, from grasslands and mountain ecosystems to boreal forest and Arctic tundra. Overall, 70,000 species have been described in Canada – and their beauty is not lost on Canadians.

This year's RCEN General Assembly is a clear affirmation of the importance of nature to Canadians, as RCEN has shown much foresight in choosing the theme of "Cities and Biodiversity". The convening of your assembly in conjunction with the Urban Nature Forum is very much opportune and I would congratulate the President of the Board and the Executive Director for this decision. I would like also to welcome the participants of the 23 countries representing 50 cities attending our meeting this evening.

People everywhere are increasingly moving out of the countryside and into cities: more than 50 per cent of the world's population currently lives in cities, and 70 per cent will by 2030. This means that the environmental impact of cities is increasing rapidly while people are becoming more and more isolated from nature.

The Convention is committed to addressing this issue, having launched an initiative on cities and biodiversity in 2007. I had the pleasure of speaking on this topic this morning at the ICLEI Urban Nature Forum, stressing the importance of the ICLEI Local Action for Biodiversity project and the recently-launched Global Partnership on Cities and Biodiversity. Tonight, I would like to say a word about the nature of the Convention more generally, and highlight some of the local actions that Contracting Parties have taken to help attain its objectives.

The Convention has three main goals: 1) to conserve biological diversity; 2) to ensure the sustainable use of biological resources; and 3) to promote the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources. At the national level, the Convention commits its Parties to adopt measures to achieve these goals in accordance with their national circumstances. The Convention also promotes international cooperation and establishes thematic and cross-cutting programmes of work to advance its objectives. These programmes, which include those on inland water and forest biodiversity, invasive alien species, climate change, and incentive measures, provide a common framework and guidelines for biodiversity initiatives at the national, regional and global levels.

Good examples of local action that help toward meeting the Convention's objectives come from the City of Montreal, where the Convention's Secretariat is located. Montreal has implemented a policy respecting the protection and enhancement of the natural environment. The goal is to increase the overall area of protected natural spaces by reconciling economic, social and environmental interests. The city has invested \$35 million into these efforts, and ten eco-territories have been designated in the city's master plan.

Montreal also has adopted a tree policy that aims to diversify the species of trees lining city streets, in order to better withstand the effects of climate change and insect infestations. In 2006, the city planted 9,000 trees with the objective of planting "the right tree at the right place", creating a greater diversity of tree species and expanding canopy cover to offset the heat-island effect.

The work done by Montreal's nature museums is also praiseworthy. Their mission is to increase public knowledge of nature, contribute to the study and preservation of biodiversity and promote responsible environmental behaviour. To this end, the Montreal Botanical Garden, has established a "Conservation Emergency Programme", which helps visitors to appreciate local endangered plant species and develop awareness about the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. The program also develops research aimed at establishing a basis for the *ex situ* and *in situ* conservation of Quebec's rare plants. In addition, the Garden conducted a research project that studied traditional knowledge of the First Nations, which led to the rediscovery of the medicinal potential of many wild species and highlighted their importance in maintaining the health of First Nations people.

Further examples of effective local action being taken to preserve biodiversity come from the city of Bonn, Germany, where the most recent meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention was held. Bonn has a long-standing city policy of nature protection and environmentally-sensitive spatial planning. Practices included providing lasting protection for trees, protecting streams and meadows, establishing and caring for green spaces, promoting the city's Biological Station, engaging in environmental education, supporting organic farming and promoting the use of regional fruits and vegetables in order to preserve diversity among crops. In addition, Bonn's Botanical Gardens are also host 12,000 species, including many that are threatened or close to extinction.

The city of Nagoya, Japan, which will host to the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention in October of 2010, is another leader in implementing biodiversity-friendly measures. When in the late 1990s the city designated part of the Fujimae Tidal Flat as a candidate site for a new landfill, there were strong calls to preserve the tidal flat because of its water-purifying function and its location as one of the largest stopovers in Japan for migratory birds. In 1999, the city abandoned the plan to use the flats and instead called for a substantial reduction in the amount of garbage it produced. A partnership between citizens, corporations

and government set a target to reduce garbage by 200,000 tonnes – 20 per cent of total volume – over the following few years.

To do this, the whole city worked to reduce garbage production by expanding the separate collection of empty bottles and cans in order to cover the whole city, and by starting the recycling of containers and packaging in advance of the rest of the country. The separate collection and recycling of kitchen garbage was subsequently started in some parts of the city. In 1998, the annual volume of garbage was 1.02 million tonnes, but thanks to this initiative the figure was reduced by 30 per cent to 720,000 tonnes in 2005, exceeding the initial target. In addition, the volume of recyclables collected rose from about 150,000 tonnes in 1998 to 390,000 tonnes in 2005, a 260 per cent increase. Overall, this initiative allowed for the prolonged use of existing landfill sites, and enabled the preservation of the tidal flats.

Nagoya has also been a leader in environmental education, having opened the Nagoya Eco-Campus in March 2005. Created through the collaborative efforts of citizens, companies, universities and the government, the Eco-Campus offers environmental courses to anyone, from adults to children, and uses the entire city as its campus. One of the goals of these courses is to increase the number of people participating in the Eco-Life Challenge, which asks them to adopt a more eco-friendly lifestyle by taking on a set of twenty challenges. Another goal of the courses is to increase the number of eco-accredited businesses, these being businesses that adopt certified measures to reduce their carbon dioxide emissions and environmental impact. So far the courses have been highly successful. In 2006 the Eco-Campus offered 110 courses, which were attended by around 11,000 people, and the number of eco-accredited businesses increased from 579 in 2005 to 850 in 2007.

Nagoya has also targeted children and youth by creating Eco-Schools. These are run for elementary, junior high, senior high and special-needs students, while Eco-Kids courses are run for preschoolers. Currently, 388 schools and 467 kindergartens and nursery schools are engaged in developing environmental activities that go beyond classroom studies and provide hands-on experience with nature.

It is therefore fitting that Nagoya will host on 24-26 October 2010 the City Summit on Biodiversity. This unique event in the life of the Convention will not be a side-event but a full component of the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties as a result of the decision on cities and local authorities adopted by the Parties at their last meeting. The City Summit will build on the achievements of the Curitiba Declaration on “Cities and Biodiversity” adopted in March 2007 as well as the Bonn meeting on “Local Action for Biodiversity” held in May 2008. The City Summit will have before it the Singapore Urban Biodiversity Index as well as the guidance for the preparation of urban biodiversity strategies and action plan to be developed at the meeting to be held in Curitiba in November this year. The results of the City Summit will be submitted to the High level segment of the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. A dialogue between Ministers and mayors will be organized.

Engaging the cities and local authorities requires also the engagement of the leaders of tomorrow, the children of today. It is in this spirit that at the initiative of Germany, an international programme aimed at young people is *The Green Wave* initiative, which is supported by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity. One element of this initiative involves a tree-planting campaign that has children and youth in schools and groups worldwide plant a tree at 10 a.m. local time on 22 May—the International Day for Biological Diversity—creating a “green wave” across time-zones. This year, hundreds of different groups participated in the initiative, including schools, biodiversity institutes, botanical gardens, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, governments, businesses and the media. Moreover, a

recent partnership with Airbus, the National Geographic Society and others is set to transform *The Green Wave* into the world's largest educational programme on biodiversity for children, youth and their families. Using the communication tools of National Geographic, which is distributed in 150 countries and has its own television channel, *The Green Wave* will achieve an unprecedented level of exposure. Participating in this initiative is therefore an effective way to involve urban youth in the international effort to stop biodiversity loss.

The Nagoya Biodiversity Summit will coincide with the celebration of the 2010 international year on biodiversity which will offer a unique opportunity to engage all stakeholders including heads of state and government. Indeed the United Nations General Assembly will convene, for the first time, a high level segment with the participation of heads of State and Government in September 2010. The results of this unprecedented event in the life of the convention will guide and inspire the high-level segment of the Nagoya meeting. 2010 will also coincide with the G8 summit to be held under the leadership of Canada in June 2010. As the host of the sole Rio convention located for the last 13 years in North America, in Montreal, Canada is therefore in a position to lead by example and to provide leadership by ensuring that biodiversity is front and centre during the deliberations of the G8.

Indeed, next year's G8 will be one of the final milestones in a process that began at the start of this millennium and will culminate at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, in Nagoya. In The Hague in 2002, at their sixth meeting, the Parties to the Convention set a target to slow rates of biodiversity loss worldwide by 2010 as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on Earth. The 2010 biodiversity target was then endorsed later the same year by the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development and the United Nations General Assembly. It was then incorporated as a new target under the Millennium Development Goals. Subsequently, the enhanced phase of implementation of a biodiversity preservation strategy was initiated at the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in Curitiba in 2006, and the enhanced phase of commitment at the ninth meeting, in Bonn in 2008. At the same time, G8 environment ministers developed the "Potsdam Initiative", the "Kobe Call for Action for Biodiversity" and the "Carta di Siricusa" or "Syracuse Charter" on biodiversity, giving biodiversity a new-found prominence at the G8 summits in Heiligendamm, Hokkaido/Toyako and L'Aquila.

With all of the momentum we have built to date, next June it will be Canada's turn to strengthen the position of biodiversity on the international agenda. Shortly following the G8 Summit, Heads of State and Government attending the sixty-fifth session of the United Nations General Assembly will discuss the importance of biodiversity for the first time ever. Then, in October in Nagoya, the 192 Parties to our Convention are expected to assess progress toward the 2010 biodiversity target, adopt an International Regime on Access and Benefit-sharing, set a post-2010 target agenda and formalize a new Strategic Plan.

The Nagoya Biodiversity Summit will be an historical event. These are exciting and important times in the ongoing struggle to preserve the world's biodiversity, and the world can only benefit from Canadian leadership and wisdom.

Let me leave you with the words of Emily Carr, who captured the natural beauty of Canada so hauntingly in her paintings: "It is wonderful to feel the grandness of Canada in the raw, not because she is Canada but because she's something sublime that you were born into, some great rugged power that you are a part of." I hope these words can provide you with some inspiration in designing the new partnership between the Canadian Environmental Network and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity. In taking up my assignment on 3 January 2006, I called on the Canadian civil society to join forces with the Secretariat in

establishing the Canadian Friends of the Convention. Tonight, I feel that through your unique network I found 600 friends of the Convention on Biological Diversity from coast to coast. I therefore look forward to meeting your Executive Director in Montreal in early July to discuss our partnership and to prepare next year's General Assembly, to be held in Montreal in November 2010 under the theme of biodiversity, to agree on our post-Nagoya partnership and to contribute to the celebration of the International of Biodiversity.

Thank you for your kind attention and I wish you a very successful meeting.