



Convention on
Biological Diversity



STATEMENT

BY MR AHMED DJOGLAF

**THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE
CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

ON THE OCCASION OF THE

**2ND INTERNATIONAL YOUTH SYMPOSIUM FOR
BIODIVERSITY**

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Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear participants,

There is a Native American proverb that says, “We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.” The organizers of this second International Youth Symposium for Biodiversity clearly understand that wisdom. Countless decisions being made every day are drastically affecting the future you students will face when you finish school and set out on your different paths in life. It is terribly sad that the Earth being returned to you by your elders is in the process of losing much of its natural beauty and richness.

As participants in this symposium, you are well aware that you share this planet with millions of other species, and that we humans depend on these species for so important many things. Plants and animals provide us with the food we eat and the medicines that heal us. Trees give us the lumber we use to make buildings. Forests and wetlands purify the water we drink and the air we breathe. And yet the world’s biodiversity is rapidly being lost: every day a few more species go extinct because of human activities – because we are cutting down forests, overfishing, releasing pollutants into lakes and rivers, and changing the climate through the chemicals we are putting into the atmosphere.

That is why young people like you came to together four years ago in Mexico, at the first International Youth Symposium for Biodiversity, to produce the Youth Accord. This accord urged politicians and decision-makers to protect life on earth and preserve the environment through concrete actions, amongst them promoting recycling, preserving coral reefs and forests, and fighting global warming. The accord was very important, because the voice of young people needs to be front and centre at the highest political levels. After all, it is your future that is being threatened.

I am glad to say that an increasing number of people have this in mind. The Convention on Biological Diversity, for example, is an international treaty devoted to preserving the world’s biodiversity. Over its seventeen-year history, nearly all countries have joined the Convention, and we are fighting hard to make sure that future generations will be able to benefit from the richness of life on Earth.

Among the many things done under the Convention is the promotion of environmental education. One of the main reasons we have lost so much biodiversity is that people in the past did not truly know how valuable it was. This symposium is proof that things are changing. Ultimately, we need to make sure that environmental education of some sort is going on every day in every corner of the planet. We need to train a generation of decision and policy makers to be environmental stewards. That is what makes teachers so very important – their mentoring is crucial to spreading environmental awareness and engaging young people. It is crucial to helping students become informed and active citizens.

With this in mind, I would like to congratulate and thank a model teacher, Michael Leveille, for starting the Macoun Marsh Project. I would also like to commend everyone else who has helped make the project such a success over the past few years. What an inspiring example of how to engage youth in biodiversity preservation in the local community. I am sure that tomorrow’s visit to the marsh and tree-planting event will be memorable experiences for all

participants.

The Secretariat of Convention on Biological Diversity supports a like-minded project that aims to give young people hands-on experience with biodiversity preservation. At the initiative of Germany, an international programme called *The Green Wave* was started a few years ago. A central feature of the programme is a tree-planting campaign that has 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 Green Wave*, 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 the *National Geographic*, which is distributed in 150 countries and has its own television channel, *The Green Wave* will achieve an unprecedented level of exposure. Incorporating *The Green Wave*’s yearly tree-planting event into the International Day for Biological Diversity would be an excellent way to connect the Macoun Marsh Project to similar efforts around the world.

Looking forward, next year presents us all with an important opportunity to help raise awareness about biodiversity loss. The United Nations General Assembly has declared 2010 to be the International Year of Biodiversity. Celebrations will take place all year long at the highest political levels, but these celebrations need to be reinforced by community-level activities. Key institutions like schools, universities, museums, parks and community centres all need to carry out their own celebrations and reach out to the broader community, making as many people as possible understand why biodiversity is being lost, why its loss is a problem, and what can be done about it.

2010 is also significant because the member nations of the Convention on Biological Diversity resolved to significantly slow biodiversity loss worldwide by this time. This is a hugely ambitious target, and at our tenth meeting in Nagoya, Japan, in October 2010, we will be assessing just how close we have come to achieving it. In making this assessment, we will also be creating a forward-looking strategy for slowing and ultimately stopping biodiversity loss in the years to come. As such, any pressure you can put on your government representatives to actively participate in the Nagoya Biodiversity Summit would go a long way to making sure that the international community is fully engaged at this crucial moment in the struggle to save life on earth.

Not so long ago, David Suzuki, Canada’s leading environmentalist, said that “this is the moment where we are going to have to make major decisions on how we live on this planet.” And that is exactly right. If there is one thing I can leave you with, it would be a sense of urgency. You are never too young to get involved – or too old, for that matter. Now is the time for youth to actively fight for their future – and also the time for your teachers, parents and grandparents to actively fight for the health of the planet they are passing on to you.

I commend you all for being here today, for organizing and participating in this symposium, for being committed to protecting the diversity of life on this one planet that all of us share. Working together across generations, I am sure we will be able to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

Thank you for your kind attention.