



Convention on
Biological Diversity



STATEMENT

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

ON THE OCCASION OF

DIVERSITY FOR LIFE – PLANNING WORKSHOP

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Ladies and gentleman,

The Diversity for Life campaign, with its goal of motivating people to use agricultural biodiversity to improve their nutrition, their livelihoods, and the health of the planet, could not be more important. With an estimated three-fourths of the planet's agricultural crop diversity already having been destroyed, we need to make people realize that ability of agro-ecosystems to provide humans with food and raw materials for clothing, shelter and medicine is increasingly coming under threat. We need to make it clear that vital ecosystem services – from soil and water conservation, to the maintenance of soil fertility, to pollination and natural pest control – are increasingly being imperilled. And we need to make it known that the problem is set to get worse: unless we protect agricultural biodiversity, agricultural species will not be able to adapt to the changing frost levels, higher temperatures, intensified drought and water-logging, and increased spread of diseases and pests that will accompany climate change in the years to come.

For all of these reasons, Diversity for Life has the full support of the Secretariat for the Convention on Biological Diversity. We hope that 2010, declared by UN to be the International Year of Biodiversity, will provide the campaign with an excellent opportunity to raise awareness about these issues. It will most certainly be an historic period in the struggle to save the world's biodiversity.

As you may know, the International Year is the culmination of a movement that began almost eight years ago. In 2002 at their meeting in The Hague, 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. This target was subsequently endorsed by the 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 the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, held in Curitiba in 2006, and the enhanced phase of commitment at the ninth meeting, in Bonn in 2008. During this time, G-8 Environmental Ministerial meetings presented the so-called "Potsdam Initiative", "Kobe Call for Action for Biodiversity" and "Carta di Siricusa" on biodiversity, which gave biodiversity a new level of prominence at G-8 summits in Heiligendamm, Hokkaido/Toyako and L'Aquila.

All of these developments mean that preserving biodiversity is on the political agenda in way that it has never been in the past. Having organized a series of events in eight countries next year, the Diversity for Life campaign is poised to tap into to this momentum. For example, coordinating our messages during the International Year will give greater visibility to both the Diversity of Life campaign and the efforts of the Secretariat. The goals of Diversity for Life can easily be linked to the goals that the Parties to the Convention have established for the International Year:

- 1) To enhance public awareness on the importance of conserving biodiversity and on the underlying threats to biodiversity;
- 2) To promote innovative solutions to reduce these threats;
- 3) To highlight successful case studies of projects and initiatives designed to save biodiversity by local communities and governments;
- 4) To call on individuals, organizations and governments to take immediate steps to halt biodiversity loss.

Indeed, events organized as part of Diversity for Life can usefully be framed against the backdrop of the broader, historical celebrations of the International Year.

What do these celebrations entail? The Year will be inaugurated in January in Berlin, followed 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. In October, at the Convention's tenth meeting in Nagoya, Japan, its 192 Parties will celebrate the International Year by adopting an International Regime on Access and Benefit Sharing. The closing of the International Year will coincide with the launch of the 2011 International Year on Forests, with the ceremony taking place in Japan in December.

From the perspective of the Secretariat, these celebrations can effectively reach downward to the regional and local level, and into the domain of agriculture, with the help of Bioversity and the Diversity for Life campaign.

Indeed, the Secretariat is supporting and partnering with many different groups to increase the effectiveness of biodiversity preservation efforts during 2010. For example, we are encouraging Parties to create National Committees for the International Year so they use this opportunity to accelerate their implementation of the Convention, celebrate their successes, and to mobilize society for long-term action on biodiversity. We are also collaborating with natural history museums, zoos and botanical gardens, as they have access to the general public, youth, and members of the scientific community. Working with teachers and educators will also be an important part of our efforts, as will working with indigenous and local communities. Naturally, we are also striving to engage the media, as they provide us with access to a broader audience.

One of the specific challenges we face next year is to engage more stakeholders in efforts to preserve biodiversity. As you know, biodiversity loss is interlinked with issues such as poverty, climate change, water scarcity, growth in demand, development and international conflict. As such, people must be made aware that stopping biodiversity loss is not simply a question of conserving nature, but also a question of protecting human well-being. Organizations that are not typically concerned with biodiversity need to be made aware that it is in their interests to join our efforts. Biodiversity must be mainstreamed into a range of areas, not least of which is the economic sector.

Another one of next year's challenge is to look beyond 2010. During the International Year, Parties to the Convention will be assessing the progress we have made toward the 2010 Biodiversity Target, but we will also be formulating a post-2010 biodiversity agenda. COP10 in Nagoya is expected to agree on post-2010 short- and long-term biodiversity targets – potentially for 2020 and 2050 respectively – as well as formalize a new Strategic Plan for addressing biodiversity loss in the years to come. As such, Bioversity can start to mobilize long-term support for agricultural biodiversity by encouraging its members to participate in the build up to the Nagoya Biodiversity Summit, and to actively engage in the meeting itself.

I am certain that the International Year of Biodiversity will be a watershed event in the history of the environmental movement. COP10 in Nagoya in particular will be remembered as the moment when the international community came together and firmly committed itself to engaging in concrete actions to tackle biodiversity loss in its many forms. I therefore look forward to working with you through the 2010 celebrations, past Nagoya, into the exciting years that lie ahead.

Thank you for your kind attention.