



Convention on  
Biological Diversity



## STATEMENT

**BY MR AHMED DJOGLAF**

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

**ON THE OCCASION OF**

**THE LAUNCH OF THE 4<sup>TH</sup> NATIONAL REPORT OF MEXICO**

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United Nations  
Environment Programme

413 Saint-Jacques Street, Suite 800  
Montreal, QC H2Y 1N9, Canada

Tel : +1 514 288 2220  
Fax : +1 514 288 6588

<http://www.cbd.int>  
[secretariat@cbd.int](mailto:secretariat@cbd.int)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very glad to be here with you on this important day. I would like to thank Minister of Environment and Natural Resources Juan Elvira Quesada, Minister of Foreign Affairs Patricia Espinosa Cantellano, and Dr. José Sarukhán for the invitation I received from the Mexican government to attend today's event.

Mexico is one of the most biodiverse countries in the world: it has five of the eight principal terrestrial biomes, and one of the greatest assemblages of ecosystem diversity anywhere on the planet. The statistics are truly remarkable: Mexico's share of global biodiversity is estimated at between 10 to 12% of all species, on a land area representing only 1.5% that of the Earth's total. Its aquatic and marine environments are no less diverse, with an estimated 3,500 species of marine fish – a diversity surpassed only by the Asia-Pacific region, which is 20 times larger. Off of Mexico's Caribbean coast lays the world's second largest coral Barrier Reef, and over 2,200 species of freshwater fish have been documented in Mexico's inland waters, of which 32% are endemic.

With at least 60 surviving indigenous languages, Mexico is also one of the world's great centres of cultural diversity. This cultural diversity has always been closely associated with the country's tremendous biological diversity. Mexico is one of eight global centers of crops domestication: Mesoamerican agriculture originated in Mexico, and at least 118 economically important plant species have been domesticated in the country, including beans, squash, cacao, tomatoes, avocado, vanilla, cotton and maize. For maize, this includes an astonishing 60 different races.

Mexico has continually played a leadership role during the negotiation, adoption and implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity, as evidenced by the convening here in Mexico in 1993 under the leadership of Dr. Sarukhán of the first scientific meeting under the Convention. The leadership of Mexico is also evidenced by the fact that Mexico is the sole country today represented at both the Bureau of SBSTTA 14 and COP9. May I take this opportunity to convey to Mr. Dámaso Luna Corona and Mr. Hesiquio Benitez Diaz my deepest gratitude for their continued stewardship.

It is an immense privilege and an honour for me to attend the launch of Mexico's fourth national report. Because of Mexico's tremendous biological and cultural diversity, the information contained in its fourth national report will be absolutely vital to the international community. As you know, this is critical moment in the campaign to preserve life on Earth. 2010, which is only a few months away, has been declared by the United Nations General Assembly as the International Year of Biodiversity. It is by this time that the Parties to the CBD have vowed to slow the rate biodiversity loss worldwide as means of poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on Earth. In October of next year, at our tenth Conference of the Parties, to be held in Nagoya, Japan, we will be assessing just how close we have come to achieving the 2010 Biodiversity Target, as well as formulating a post-2010 strategy for ultimately stopping biodiversity loss in the years to come. There should be no doubt that Mexico's experience to date in trying to achieve the Convention's objectives will play a large role during the deliberations of 2010 and help the Parties to devise an effective post-2010 strategy.

We have much work ahead of us, as the situation worldwide continues to be troubling. Last year's IUCN Red List revealed that 38 per cent of all examined species worldwide are at a high risk of extinction. Moreover, of the 223 species that experienced a change in their Red List

status between 2007 and 2008, 82 per cent became more threatened, while only 18 per cent became less threatened. If biodiversity loss continues unabated, it has been projected that by 2050 biodiversity levels will decline a further 11% globally, down to 62% of original, undisturbed levels.

“Life is plurality, death is uniformity” said Mexico’s great poet and Nobel laureate Octavio Paz – and this is nowhere more true than when it comes to biodiversity. The consequences of continued biodiversity loss will be a severely decreased availability of biological goods like lumber, medicine and food, and the reduced provisioning of irreplaceable ecosystem services like the renewal of soil fertility and the purification of air and water. We already see this in Mexico, where on the Pacific coast there has been a decrease in medicinal plants, firewood and building materials as a result of habitat alteration due to land use changes, which has reduced the provisioning of ecosystem services. The poor will be hit the hardest by such losses: nearly 60 per cent of the poorest people worldwide inhabit fragile vulnerable landscapes and directly depend on natural resources for their survival. This is also the case in Mexico, where a large part of the rural population gains their livelihood from small-scale traditional agricultural practices.

I therefore applaud Mexico for the biodiversity preservation measures it has taken to date. This fourth national report includes a number of welcome statistics. Between 2001 and 2008, the number of protected areas increased from 127 to 166, enlarging the protected area from 17.1 to 23.15 million hectares in terrestrial and marine ecosystems. 112 Ramsar sites have been registered, covering an area of 8 million hectares. Invasive alien species have been successfully eradicated on a number of Mexican islands due to coordinated research and action by the National Commission of Natural Protected Areas and the National Ecology Institute. From 2003 to 2007, 1.29 million hectares were included in a payment-for-ecosystem-services programme, while 2009 saw the start of a program of payments for the conservation of native maize and its wild relatives. 50 priority regions with high human pressure have been targeted for recovery, and economic measures have already been implemented in the Upper Gulf of California for the withdrawal of gillnets.

But the report also shows that Mexico, like countries everywhere, will fall short of meeting the 2010 target. Ultimately, Mexico’s National Strategy on Biodiversity is not a sound answer to its current problems. The report shows that progress toward the 2010 Target has been hampered by a lack of management skills at the state and municipal levels and the absence of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. In addition, the participation of the private and social sectors in the Strategy has not been encouraged, while the National Strategy on Biodiversity does not set precise objectives, targets or performance indicators. All of this means that there has been a continuous process of degradation, fragmentation and loss of habitat, with biodiversity still being lost overall.

These issues are similar to those raised by the various stakeholders worldwide whom the CBD has turned to for input as we begin to consider a post-2010 strategic plan. They have highlighted the importance of setting concrete preservation targets that stakeholders can strive to achieve. They have also urged us to draw new constituencies into our preservation efforts by linking biodiversity loss to issues such as poverty, climate change, water scarcity, growth in demand, development and international conflict. Finally, they have stated the need to facilitate and support national action, as countries must be able to go through their own evaluation processes, setting targets and developing biodiversity strategies at the national, provincial and municipal level.

With 2010 around the corner, now is the time to start addressing these shortcomings and renew our efforts to preserve life on Earth. Indeed, the political climate is right for a renewed long-term effort. The last three meetings of G8 environment ministers have all endorsed the 2010 target and called for increased engagement at the highest political levels in the fight to preserve biodiversity, putting biodiversity loss on the agenda at G8 summits in Heiligendamm in 2007, Hokkaido/Toyako in 2008, and L'Aquila in 2009. In September of next year, heads of state and government attending the sixty-fifth session of the UN General Assembly will for the first-time ever discuss the importance of biodiversity. We must take advantage of this political momentum and continue to expand and implement preservation strategies through 2010 and beyond.

The words of Mario Molina, a native son of Mexico and a Nobel laureate in Chemistry, assure us that our efforts will ultimately be successful. Awarded the Nobel in 1995 for helping to reveal the threat posed to the Earth's ozone layer by chlorofluorocarbon gases, he stated in his Nobel lecture that the problem of ozone depletion “has also shown us that different sectors of society can work together - the scientific community, industry, environmental organizations, government representatives and policy makers - to reach international agreements.” In 2003 he expanded on these thoughts: “Human society is now facing immense environmental challenges such as air and water pollution, climate change, and loss of biodiversity. However, even global environmental problems can be addressed effectively, provided there is a strong political wheel.”

The political wheel is moving on biodiversity loss. Now is the time for lasting, concrete action.

Thank you for your kind attention.