



Message from the Executive Secretary

Message from Ahmed Djoghlaif, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity on the occasion of

WORLD HABITAT DAY **5 October 2009** *Planning our Urban Future*

The theme for this year's World Habitat Day, Planning our Urban Future, is especially relevant to the world's biodiversity. Urban sprawl and unplanned development pose two of the greatest threats to biodiversity, with serious consequences for climate change, availability of water, food, and many other ecosystem services.

The world's urban population now exceeds its rural population. Urban growth and associated consumption and pollution have both local and global impacts. Much of this growth is occurring in developing countries, home to the largest part of Earth's biodiversity. Thus the impact cities have on biodiversity is a growing concern.

Biodiversity is vitally important for all human beings. Biodiversity supports numerous ecological services for humankind that have economic, aesthetic or recreational value. At least 40% of the world's economy and 80% of the needs of the poor are derived from biological resources. In addition, the richer the diversity of life, the greater the opportunity for medical discoveries, economic development, and adaptive responses to challenges such as climate change.

Promoting the sustainable use of biological resources, therefore, must be an integral part of any strategy aimed at addressing the future of our urban areas. The failure to address these issues at all levels of government will have serious consequences for the sustainability of our biodiversity.

Urban areas often take centre stage in the battle to save and preserve biodiversity. Primary threats to biodiversity are mostly related to public services and instruments held by local governments. Local governments are considered the front-line guardians of natural resources because they set local environment and development policy, are responsible for land-use planning, and develop and manage infrastructure that depend on and/or impact biodiversity, such as water and waste management systems.

The Convention on Biological Diversity recognizes that the achievement of its three objectives requires the full engagement of cities and local authorities. At the Ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD (COP 9), held in Bonn in 2008, Parties adopted a decision on cities and biodiversity that



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encourages all Parties to the Convention to recognize the role of cities in national strategies and plans, and invites Parties to support and assist cities in implementing the Convention at the local level.

In addition, a Global Partnership on Cities and Biodiversity was formally launched at COP 9 to support cities in the sustainable management of their biodiversity resources, assist cities to implement practices that support national, regional and international strategies, plans, and agendas on biodiversity, and to learn from existing initiatives.

To safeguard our biodiversity, we must anticipate the consequences of our actions. As the world becomes more urban, cities and local authorities will play a critical role in designing and implementing land-use and zoning planning tools, urban development and infrastructure guidelines, investment promotion, and consumer awareness campaigns, all of which directly impact biodiversity, and in particular on water, climate change, protected areas, agriculture and forests, marine and coastal biodiversity and communication, education, and public awareness.

Thus whilst cities are part of the problem, they are also part of the solution. The fight for all life on Earth will be won or lost in cities. Global change starts at the local level. Governments should see urbanisation as a positive trend and guide urban development accordingly, ensuring that biodiversity is seen for the asset it is – a necessity for our well-being and that of our Earth.

For more information, please see:-

Local Authorities and Biodiversity:

www.cbd.int/authorities

Global Partnership on Cities and Biodiversity:

www.cbd.int/authorities/Gettinginvolved/GlobalPartnership.shtmlv