



**GRULAC Regional Consultations in support of the
Finalization of the International Regime on Access & Benefit-sharing**

**15-16 January 2010
Panama City, Panama**

OPENING REMARKS BY THE CBD SECRETARIAT

Mrs Melani Castillo Him, Director of Protected Areas and Wildlife of the National Environment Authority of Panama,
Mrs Mara Murillo, Officer in Charge of UNEP's Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean,
Mr. Hodges and Mr. Casas, Co-Chairs of the Working Group on ABS
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of Dr. Ahmed Djoghlaif, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, it is my distinct pleasure to welcome you to the regional consultations for the Latin American and Caribbean countries in support of the finalization of the International Regime on Access and Benefit-sharing.

The CBD Secretariat is very pleased to have contributed to the organization of these regional consultations. I wish to express our sincere gratitude to the United Nations Environment Programme for providing the funds necessary for this meeting to take place. I also wish to thank UNEP's regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean for the organisation of this event in collaboration with the COP 9 Bureau Members for the region, Mr. Damaso Luna from Mexico and Mr. Joseph Toussaint from Haiti.

Finally, I wish to thank the government of Panama for the very warm hospitality and welcome extended to all participants in this beautiful city.

We are certainly most privileged that the consultation is being held in Panama City, the headquarters of UNEP for the region, in a country with such rich biological diversity, which has attracted important research initiatives such as the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute on Barro Colorado Island, in the middle of the Panama Canal.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This New Year is the start of a new era for the Convention. Indeed, 2010 has been declared by the United Nations General Assembly as the International Year of Biodiversity. This event offers a unique opportunity to elevate biodiversity to the highest level of the political agenda and



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to raise awareness on the need to conserve it in the minds of people around the world. One of the highlights of the IYB is, of course, the International Regime, which will be adopted in Nagoya, next October. The present meeting is another – small but essential – step on the road to Nagoya.

The last meeting of the Working Group was held in November of last year, in Montreal, Canada. Participants characterized it as a very constructive meeting, carried out in a very positive atmosphere of cooperation and compromise. The Working Group made significant progress by producing - for the very first time - a single negotiating text incorporating all the elements of the International Regime. Progress was also made on the nature of the International Regime.

This meeting takes place only a few weeks before the next and last negotiating session of the Working Group. Time is therefore of the essence. The negotiations are reaching a final stage. Against this background, it is crucial that you take full advantage of this meeting to refine your negotiating positions.

You may wish to identify the issues that are of prime importance for the region and go beyond that stage by taking note of the other group's positions and try to identify possible compromise solutions to the most difficult items. Indeed, the negotiations are reaching the final stage and time has come for the regional groups to consider each other's positions and find compromise approaches. This is very demanding but it is the only approach capable of delivering the International Regime in Nagoya, next October.

In summary, the time for advancing one's position has passed. The time has come to engage in frank and open discussions and to move forward through compromises. This is the only way to achieve our common objective. This meeting provides a unique opportunity for the GRULAC to prepare for this give and take process that must take place in Cali next March.

As announced by the Co-Chairs, as part of the inter-sessional work, an inter-regional informal consultation is to be held prior to the ninth meeting of the WG-ABS, from 16 to 18 March, in Cali, Colombia. To this end, you may wish to take the opportunity of this meeting to work towards designating the five representatives of GRULAC to these inter-regional informal consultations.

As always, the CBD Secretariat stands ready to assist you in this process. I wish you a very successful meeting.

Thank you for your attention.
