



**Convention on  
Biological Diversity**



2010 International Year of Biodiversity

## **STATEMENT**

**BY MR. AHMED DJOGLAF**

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

**ON THE OCCASION OF**

**THE AFRICAN MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON ACCESS  
AND BENEFIT-SHARING**

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*Please check against delivery*



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Your Excellency Mr. President of the Republic of Namibia,  
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In a few days, on 21 March, Namibia will celebrate its national day. This is a special celebration as it will coincide with the official appointment of the new Government following the successful election. 2010 is therefore a special year for the Namibian people but also for the international community as a whole as it coincides also with the celebration of the International Year of Biodiversity.

Under the leadership of the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), Namibia, after a long struggle, entered history as one of the youngest members of the global community of independent nations. Namibia entered history for its struggle for its political independence. Today, Namibia, is taking the lead for another struggle, the struggle for life on Earth.

History will recall that it was here in Windhoek in December 2008 that, under the leadership of Namibia, the first *technical* step towards the Aichi-Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit sharing was taken. The expert meeting held here on concepts, terms, definitions and sectoral approaches to access and benefit-sharing established the basic architecture—the foundation—of the Protocol. It succeeded in shaping a common understanding of the basic concepts underlying the journey to Nagoya.

History will also recall it was here in Windhoek in March 2010 that, under the leadership of Namibia, the first *political* step towards the Aichi-Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing was taken. The convening today of the African Ministerial Meeting on Access and Benefit-sharing less than 10 days before the start of Cali meetings sends a powerful political message from African leaders under the leadership of Namibia.

History will also recall that it was on 8 March, International Women's Day, that this political step was taken as a contribution to the advancement of women, the traditional guardians of biological resources.

At the same time, history will recall that the first world leader to be personally engaged in the negotiation of this new legal instrument for tomorrow's future is you, Mr. President of the Republic of Namibia. I would like therefore to pay tribute to Your Excellency Hifikepunye Pohamba, President of Namibia, and, through you, to the people and Government of Namibia for the unique contribution of the Namibian nation in gathering the African family together and promoting its individual and collective strategic interests on an issue vital for its future.

I wish to convey my heartfelt appreciation to the Government of Namibia for hosting this meeting, to the city of Windhoek for the warm welcome accorded to participants, and to you, Mr. President, for your leadership.

Under your able leadership, Mr. President, Namibia has a long-standing experience in making the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity one of the pillars of national development goals. Namibia has been a visionary in enshrining in its Constitution the maintenance of ecosystems, essential ecological processes and biological diversity.

While Namibia is one of Africa's most arid countries, it is also home to an astonishing variety of life. The country has a high level of endemism and is an evolutionary hub for groups of organisms such as melons, succulent plants, false spiders, geckos and tortoises.

Namibia's system of protected areas has a celebrated history dating back over 100 years. Its network of protected areas currently comprises 20 national protected areas and covers 17 per cent of the country's territory. The most recent achievement is the creation of the first Namibian

marine protected area, which runs for 400 kilometres along the coast and contains all of Namibia's islands. This enigmatic coast, the Coast of Skeletons, provides sanctuary to an astonishing variety of life.

Furthermore, the link between the marine and terrestrial parks has created a land-sea protected area that has become the largest connected protected area network in Africa and the eighth largest in the world.

The creation of the Sperrgebiet National Park not only protects one of the world's 34 biodiversity hotspots, but it is also an example of creating income-generating opportunities for communities while protecting the resources. Namibia's environment and development policies have created a framework where relevant communities are consulted, people's aspirations and livelihoods assessed and win-win partnerships forged as national and global goals are met.

As the famous Namibian proverb provides, "Elephants carry each other." This is what this meeting is about, and we hope this wisdom of the people of SADC region will inspire and guide the outcome of the Nagoya meeting. It was indeed in Johannesburg, at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, that the very idea of an international regime on access and benefit-sharing was born. It is therefore fitting that our meeting today is being held with the participation of Ms Rejoice Thizwilondi Mabudafhasi, the Deputy Minister of Environmental Affairs of South Africa and the President of the African Ministerial Conference on Environment.

The Aichi-Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing, to be adopted on 29 October this year, will be a powerful tool to translate the objectives of the Convention into reality and achieve the Millennium Development Goals through the establishment of a global partnership between the owners and the users of genetic resources for the benefit on life on Earth, the people of the world and the future of tomorrow's children.

An old Himba proverb says, "Hold this precious land gently for it does indeed hold the future." The Aichi-Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing will translate this African wisdom into reality.

Another Himba proverb says, "Start your farming with people, not with cattle." And the Aichi-Nagoya Protocol is indeed about people, our future and our planet. However, the farming would not be possible without the support of the African's partners. I want to pay tribute to the Government and people of Denmark, represented here today by Mrs. Karen Ellemann, the newly appointed Minister of the Environment. Congratulations, Madam Minister, and thank you for your support. I would like also to extend my gratitude to the Government of Germany, representing the Presidency of the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, for their unique contribution. I would like also to thank Norway for its support

History will recall that the support of the Dutch-German ABS Capacity Development Initiative for Africa, through more than 20 thematically specific or regionally focused ABS workshops and training sessions was part and parcel of the ABS Windhoek Initiative. Our children in reading the forthcoming book of the Co-Chairs will also acknowledge their unique contribution in elevating the 2010 International Year of Biodiversity into an historic year for humanity, as, indeed, "Biodiversity is life. Biodiversity is OUR life".

I thank you for your kind attention

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