



**Convention on  
Biological Diversity**



## **STATEMENT**

**BY MR. AHMED DJOGHLAF**

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

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE**

**OPENING OF THE NINTH SESSION OF THE UNITED  
NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES:  
“INDIGENOUS PEOPLES; DEVELOPMENT WITH CULTURE  
AND IDENTITY”**

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*Please check against delivery*

Distinguished Delegates,

Let me, Mr Chairman, convey to you my warmest congratulations upon your election as the Chair of this important forum. May I also ask you, Mr. Carlos Mamani Condori, to convey to the Bolivian authorities our deep appreciation for the initiative taken to declare 22 April as the International Mother Earth Day. This event, which will be celebrated this week, will take place one month before this year's International Day for Biological Diversity, the theme of which will be "Biodiversity for development and poverty alleviation".

The third edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook, to be released on 10 May, will demonstrate that biodiversity continues to be lost at an unprecedented rate. The negative impact of this loss, compounded by climate change, will affect all the countries and the citizens of the world. But those who will suffer the most are the poor and the most vulnerable segments of society and, in particular, indigenous people. It is for this reason that the protection of traditional knowledge of indigenous and local communities is at the heart of the operations of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The mandate of your Forum is indeed central to the work of the Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions of the Convention.

The theme of your session this year—"Development with identity and culture"—complements two important international events, the International Year of Biological Diversity and our sister year, the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures.

These events come together at this meeting – drawn together by their very custodians – the world's indigenous peoples.

By declaring 2010 the International Year of Biodiversity, the United Nations General Assembly provides us with a unique opportunity for highlighting the role of indigenous and local communities and their traditional knowledge in achieving the goals of the Convention on Biological Diversity, which I often paraphrase as "the Convention on life on Earth", or perhaps as indigenous peoples often say, "Saving Mother Earth – or Pachamama."

The promotion and protection of biological and of cultural diversity is a unique opportunity to unite and cooperate.

Ultimately, the conservation, sustainable use, the fair and equitable access to benefits deriving from biological diversity and the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions will strengthen friendly relations among States, can assist in attaining the Millennium Development Goals, and can contribute to peace for humankind. The development of positive relations between cultures can only blossom in healthy environments.

The great French environmental philosopher Michele Serres wrote extensively about the relationship between cultures and biological diversity, which he referred to "as the basis of an oral contract of mutual obligation – the breaking of which has dire consequences for all of humanity". He reminds us of the importance of the task before us – to work with the custodians of diversity to ensure that the great treasures of this Earth and of humanity are not squandered or lost.

The Secretariat for the Convention is proud to be a key partner in the ninth session of this Forum and, in particular, the Secretariat will lead a two-hour in-depth dialogue with UNPFII members on Friday, 23 April.

Also, the Secretariat has worked tirelessly with indigenous partners and other United Nations agencies to ensure a full and rich menu of events for this session.

#### *IYB events and products*

In particular, the Secretariat has prepared a photographic and text exhibition titled “*Indigenous and Local Communities: Stewards of Biological and Cultural Diversity, Partners in Saving Life on Earth*”, which will be launch with a reception tomorrow at 6.30 p.m. Tuesday, 20 April, in the entrance of United Nations Headquarters.

The Secretariat will host a side-event with UNESCO and Tebtebba Foundation on indigenous perspectives - community education and public awareness materials and products designed for the International Year of Biodiversity. The Secretariat has worked with consultants and the indigenous working group on communication, education and public awareness (CEPA) to produce an interesting menu of products with two foci.

The first focus is to inform indigenous and local communities of the Convention processes and how to participate effectively in the work of the Convention. The second focus is geared towards educating the general public about the important role that indigenous and local communities and their traditional knowledge play in promoting biological and cultural diversity.

These materials include: a short film on traditional knowledge in the South Pacific that looks at coral gardening, strengthening traditional fish traps and reef restoration; an animated film with a North American indigenous flavour that draws attention to the crucial role traditional knowledge plays in saving our diversity is being made for children of all ages; traditional knowledge posters in indigenous languages (in partnership with UNESCO), radio stories by indigenous experts for the Amazon and Andean regions, and a photography exhibition at United Nations Headquarters. The exhibition draws attention to both international years and the crucial role of indigenous and local communities as custodians of the world’s biological and cultural diversity.

In an effort to support indigenous-owned communication initiatives, the Secretariat is also working with the [indigenousportal.com](http://indigenousportal.com), an Internet initiative which works in four languages (English, Spanish, French and Russian), to raise the profile of Convention issues of interest to indigenous and local communities and to inform indigenous and local communities about the opportunities to participate in the work of the Convention.

#### *Negotiations on an international regime on access to genetic resources and benefit-sharing*

During this International Year of Biodiversity, one of the most critical issues for indigenous and local communities, and indeed for the citizens of the world, is the negotiation of an international regime on access and benefit-sharing (ABS), as it related to genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge.

This may also be the most notable advance within the framework of the Convention, relevant to human development, since its conception, and stems from the commitment of the Parties to implement the third objective of the Convention, namely, the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources, through the adoption and implementation of the international regime at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, in Nagoya, in October.

One of the most important aspects of these negotiations for indigenous and local communities is the protection of their knowledge, innovations and practices associated with genetic resources through a requirement that such knowledge is accessed with their prior informed consent or approval. Secondly, and of equal importance, is that when such knowledge is used, it gives rise to the equitable sharing of benefits.

The role of traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources is a fundamental aspect in negotiating the international regime, which promises to establish a much needed balance in the interest of all concerned, notably the indigenous communities. Moreover, I am pleased to note that the effective participation of indigenous and local community representatives in these important negotiations has been a unique feature of this process.

*The Nagoya Biodiversity Summit (COP 10) and the future*

A decade ago, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention established a working group specifically to address the implementation of Article 8(j) of the Convention and related provisions on traditional knowledge. The Ad Hoc Open-ended Intersessional Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions is responsible for the development and implementation of an ambitious work programme aimed at achieving respect for, preservation and promotion of traditional knowledge, with the approval of the relevant of indigenous and local communities. The Working Group on Article 8 (j) is open to all Parties to the Convention, and indigenous and local communities' representatives play a full and active role in its work.

At the sixth meeting of the Working Group, in November 2009, participants discussed an exciting forward-looking, multi-year programme of work focusing on customary sustainable use. They also considered whether future in-depth dialogues could contribute to the grave issues currently facing humanity, such as climate change, the unsustainable use of the Earth's resources and the mass extinctions of plants and animals.

Increasingly, the work of Article 8(j) and the related articles of the Convention clearly highlight the fundamental role that traditional knowledge plays in biodiversity conservation, as well as the need for implementation at the local level. The experiences and challenges outlined in the most recent edition of *Pachamama* are some examples of how these local actions show a deep connection with, and a true love for, Pachamama - Mother Earth.

It is with deep respect that I extend my hand to the world's indigenous and local communities as my partners in saving our Earth in all her beauty and diversity both for now and for future generations.

Thank you.

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