



MESSAGE BY

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CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

ON THE OCCASION OF THE

**MINISTERIAL SEGMENT OF THE
XVII MEETING OF THE FORUM OF MINISTERS OF
ENVIRONMENT OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

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Please check against delivery



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Life in harmony, into the future
いのちの共生を、未来へ
COP 10 / MOP 5

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Regardless of the theory chosen explaining the origins of its name –tree, butterfly, or fish– the name of the City of Panamá is closely associated with biodiversity. It is therefore fitting that the seventeenth forum of Ministers of the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean be held here in Panamá City, the headquarters of the Regional Office for Latin America & the Caribbean (ROLAC) of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Let me therefore convey to His Excellency the Minister of Environment of Panamá our gratitude for hosting this important meeting. The President of the Republic of Panamá, H.E. Mr. Martín Torrijos Espino, stated at the sixty-third session of the United Nations General Assembly: “Indeed, ever-greater importance is to be attached to the way we relate to the ecosystems that sustain life throughout the world, and how that affects the survival of our species and civilization”.

The history and the development of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) are closely associated with the LAC region. Indeed, the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the CBD was chaired by Ambassador Vincente Sanchez from Chile. The first Executive Secretary of the CBD was Ms. Angela Cropper from Trinidad & Tobago. The First Ordinary Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 1) was held in Nassau, Bahamas, in 1994. The enhanced phase of implementation of the three objectives of the CBD started four years ago in Curitiba at COP 8. The Co-Chair of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Access and Benefit-sharing is Mr. Fernando Casas from Colombia. And last month in Cali, the draft Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing was born. It is therefore fitting that one of the most megadiverse regions of the world has on the agenda of this meeting biodiversity. It is for me an honour and privilege to attend for the first time this important Forum.

Latin American and Caribbean countries enjoy an immense richness of biodiversity. South America has more than 40 per cent of the Earth’s biodiversity and more than one-quarter of its forests. Latin American and the Caribbean, and particularly their poorest inhabitants, will increasingly suffer as a result of such unprecedented biodiversity loss. Some of the main threats to biodiversity include: destruction of habitat; contamination of ecosystems; species trafficking; genetic erosion; and over exploitation of several commercially important species. The preservation of biodiversity is crucial as it helps maintain equilibrium in all kind of environments, such as marine and forest ecosystems. Such equilibrium is necessary to maintain the strength of ecosystems to deal with natural disasters or issues like pollution and climate change. These ecosystems not only provide habitat for important animal and plants species, but also provide a variety of ecosystem services that benefit humans. Human populations are dependent on these services for their livelihood and the current decline in biodiversity worldwide is jeopardizing many areas of life.

In spite of these challenges, interesting initiatives are under way. For example, The Panamanian National System of Protected Areas (SINAP) represents the principle force for the conservation of the country’s extraordinary biological richness in situ, with 65 official designation protected areas, which covers 34 per cent of the total land area. In addition, Panama has participated in the preparation of the Project “Conservation and Sustainable Use of Neotropical Native Crops and Wild Relatives of Crops in Central and Latin America”. This project complements the overall biodiversity conservation goals of the Mesoamerican Biological

Corridor with specific and specialized focus on the agriculture/conservation interface. The last Sixteenth Forum of Ministers of the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean inspired activities focused on collaborating in organizing national, regional, sub-regional conferences and seminars with an aim to publicize activities regarding environmental education, and to promote Latin American cooperation in this area and in the editorial field. An important statement was made at UNEP's twenty-fifth session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum: "Ministers of environment must be ministers for sustained economic success." These initiatives are of great value, and I encourage you to keep concentrating on building alliances with regional organizations, the private sector and community organizations, especially in areas like promoting knowledge integration and management into communities, business, and academia.

The 2010 International Year of Biodiversity provides a unique opportunity to put biodiversity at the top of the political agenda and develop partnerships to protect life on Earth. The high-level meeting of the sixty-fifth session of the United Nations General Assembly devoted to biodiversity is another opportunity for the international community to share best practices and get involved in acting for the preservation of biodiversity. To quote the famous writer, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, "It is not true that people stop pursuing dreams because they grow old, they grow old because they stop pursuing dreams". Let us not allow ourselves and our Earth to grow old, let us continue pursuing this dream.

You are engaged in the preparation of the new regional work programme for 2010-2011. I would like therefore, on behalf of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, to offer our full collaboration to ensure that your regional work programme will promote the implementation of the new Strategic Plan of the Convention for 2011-2020 to be adopted in Nagoya, and initiate the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing to be adopted on 29 October this year.

As the President of the Republic of Panamá, H.E. Mr. Ricardo Martinelli Berrocal, said at the sixty-fourth session of the United Nations General Assembly: "The options are clear: we can talk or we can act". It is time to act now, and act together. I believe that this Forum is an excellent opportunity to act now. You are the regional experts in environmental issues and you can be the regional leaders in biodiversity preservation. I urge you to keep in mind, during this important regional meeting, that

Biodiversity is Life. Biodiversity is OUR Life

Thank you for your kind attention.
