



**Convention on
Biological Diversity**



2010 International Year of Biodiversity

STATEMENT

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CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

ON THE OCCASION OF

THE 4TH GLOBAL BOTANIC GARDEN CONGRESS

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

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour to be speaking at the Dublin Botanic Gardens. Walking through the gardens and glasshouses of this remarkable institution, one cannot help but feel the presence of history. History, because the Gardens are over 200 centuries old, having been founded in 1795. History, because the thousands of plants species found here provide a beautiful glimpse of the great diversity of life that has evolved on this planet over millions of years. History, because Dublin itself is a city with a long and illustrious heritage.

History, of course, is something that we humans play a role in shaping – for good or for bad. In his novel *Ulysses*, James Joyce, that great son of Dublin, had his alter ego Stephen Dedalus observe “History is nightmare from which I am trying to awake.” In our grimmer moments, this is surely a thought many of us have had – particularly those of us who are trying to stop the rapid destruction of life on this planet.

The statistics on biodiversity loss are familiar to everyone here. We humans are estimated to be driving species extinct at up to 1,000 times the natural background rate. Approximately 60 per cent of examined ecosystem services have been degraded worldwide in the last 50 years. By the year 2000, only about 73 per cent of the world’s original levels biodiversity were remaining.

Everyone here today is also likely familiar with the statistics on the human impacts of biodiversity loss. 300 million people worldwide, the majority poor, are estimated to depend substantially on forest biodiversity, including non-wood forest products, for their survival and livelihood. 1 billion people depend on fish as their sole or main source of animal protein, while fish provided more than 2.6 billion people with at least 20 percent of their average per capita animal protein intake. Coral reefs provide food and livelihood for most of the estimated 30 million small-scale fishers in the developing world.

Such statistics are why in 2002 the international community resolved to stop the nightmare we have been threatening to make of history. At the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development, world leaders agreed to achieve the 2010 Biodiversity Target of significantly slowing rates of biodiversity loss worldwide by 2010 as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on Earth. The 2010 target was subsequently incorporated into the Millennium Development Goals, and the UN General Assembly declared 2010 the International Year of Biodiversity.

And yet as W.B. Yeats famously wrote, “in dreams begins responsibility”. Following the establishment of the 2010 target, our collective responsibility has been to undertake concrete action to save life on Earth.

This has been particularly true when it comes to plants. Not only are plants the foundation of all food chains, but we rely on crop plants for food and fibres. In addition, many thousands of wild plants have great economic and cultural importance, providing food, medicine, fuel, clothing and shelter for all human beings. Compounds from plant species are the basis of 50 per cent of modern prescription medicines, while 80 per cent of the world’s people rely on traditional, plant-based medicine. Indeed, medicinal plants are widely used throughout the developing world, as in Ghana, where 60 per cent of childhood malarial fevers are first treated with traditional, plant-based medicines.

This is why the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity established the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation in 2002, with the long-term objective of halting the worldwide

loss of plant diversity. To achieve this end the GSPC includes 16 outcome-oriented global targets for 2010 and provides a framework for harmonizing existing initiatives aimed at plant conservation, identifying gaps where new initiatives are required and promoting mobilization of the necessary resources. Because of its comprehensive nature, the GSPC has garnered the support of a wide range of organizations and institutions, including governments, intergovernmental organizations, universities, research institutes, nongovernmental organizations and their networks, the private sector, protected-area management boards, gene banks – and of course botanic gardens.

Indeed, the participation of botanic gardens has been, and will continue to be, essential for the success of the GSPC. Botanic gardens are one of the primary repositories of the scientific samples that underpin our understanding of biodiversity. Through cutting-edge research, they extend our knowledge of the structure and dynamics of life on Earth, both past and present. Through partnerships, training and capacity-building programs, they strengthen the global capability to address current and future environmental challenges. Moreover, they are a key forum for direct engagement with civil society, which is indispensable in bringing about the behavioural changes on which our common future and the future of nature depend.

All of this is why the Convention signed a Memorandum of Understanding with six leading scientific institutions in 2006, including the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, and the Natural History Museum of France. The purpose of the MOU was to leverage the expertise of these institutions in order to implement education and training activities to support developing countries building scientific, technical and policy skills in the area of biodiversity. Since then, the Convention's Consortium of Scientific Partners on Biodiversity has been extended to ten scientific institutions.

Through the help of our invaluable partners, including many of you gathered here today, the GSPC has turned into a solid foundation for real and significant progress in plant conservation throughout the world. Substantial progress has been reported for eight of the sixteen GSPC targets. The Strategy has provided a useful entry point for our Parties to address issues related to poverty alleviation, helping to achieve the Millennium Development Goals at national and global levels while ensuring that local communities continue to derive benefits from plant diversity.

However, there remains cause for concern. Limited progress has been made so far in the achievement of several key GSPC targets, notably:

- Target 2: the completion of preliminary conservation assessments;
- Target 4: the conservation of ecological regions;
- Target 6: the conservation of biodiversity in production lands;
- Target 12: the sustainable use of plant-based products; and
- Target 15: capacity and training for plant conservation.

In addition, while the Strategy has been readily adopted by the botanical and conservation communities, there is a continuing need to integrate it into agricultural, forestry and other land management policies.

Perhaps the most telling fact is that today two thirds of the world's plant species remain in danger of extinction. Moreover, progress we have made to date may be compromised in the near

future by climate change, since a rise in global temperature is predicted to increase the extinction rate of plant species. There is therefore a real need to look beyond 2010 and build on the achievements made during the implementation of the current strategy.

This is a message echoed at a broader scale by the recently-released third edition of *Global Biodiversity Outlook*, which concludes that overall the 2010 biodiversity target has not been met. Reviewing all available evidence, including the national reports of over 110 Parties to the CBD and the scientific literature, GBO3 concludes that biodiversity today continues to disappear at an unprecedented rate.

GBO3 further shows that the five main global drivers of biodiversity loss – habitat loss, the unsustainable use and overexploitation of resources, climate change, the spread of invasive alien species, and pollution – have not only remained more or less constant over the last decade, but are in some cases intensifying. The report warns that irreversible degradation may take place if ecosystems are pushed beyond certain tipping points, leading to the widespread loss of ecosystem services that we depend on greatly.

During this 2010 International Year of Biodiversity, it is our collective responsibility to learn from our successes and failures to date and renew our efforts to save life on Earth. Not merely our responsibility, but our moral obligation. As the great Irish poet and Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney said, “Even if the last move did not succeed, the inner command says move again.”

I am glad to say that the International Year of Biodiversity is unfolding in this spirit. Participation has been worldwide: after the official launch in early January in Berlin under the chairmanship of the Chancellor Merkel, regional launches took place in Curitiba, Paris, London, Nagoya, Madrid, New York, Beijing, New Delhi and Tokyo, among other location. These events have been integral in creating momentum toward the 65th session of the UN General Assembly this September, which will for the first time ever discuss the importance of biodiversity, its role in sustainable development, its role in the fight against climate change, as well as future actions.

In addition, over the first half of this year a series of consultations and meetings have taken place with the aim of revising and updating the strategic plan of the Convention for the period 2011-2020, culminating work that began several years ago. And indeed, just last month in Nairobi the third meeting of the Working Group on Review of Implementation of the Convention produced a draft agreement on the new strategic plan and on mobilizing financial resources. With the participation of a broad range of stakeholders – including youth, local and indigenous authorities, parliamentarians, cooperative agencies and the private sector – the new strategic plan is expected to be finalized this October at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention in Nagoya, Japan,.

Work to date on the new strategic plan has attempted to improve on the previous plan in two key ways. The first way is by providing a mission and targets for 2020 that are both achievable and more measurable, and with a clear underlying logic consistent with the available scientific evidence, including the scientific review of biodiversity projections prepared for *Global Biodiversity Outlook 3*. These will be the so-called SMART targets—goals that are at once strategic, measurable, ambitious yet realistic and time-bound.

The second way is by providing a more effective framework for national implementation of the three objectives of the Convention. This framework is expected to include national targets, appropriate support mechanisms and a more robust approach to monitoring and review at both

national and global levels, as well as an enhanced role for the Conference of the Parties in reviewing implementation and learning from past experience.

The post-2010 Strategic Plan is expected to have several other key components. These include:

- drawing strong links between biodiversity, ecosystem services and human wellbeing;
- addressing the economic value of biodiversity and ecosystem services;
- making explicit the importance of biodiversity preservation for poverty eradication and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals;
- addressing both the direct and indirect drivers of biodiversity loss, the latter including *inter alia* excessive consumption, for example of fossil fuels and meat, population growth, environmentally harmful subsidies, and a lack of public awareness about the harmful consequences of biodiversity loss;
- promoting concerted action by all by all sectors of government and society in addressing biodiversity loss; and
- linking such action with efforts to combat and adapt to climate change.

In sum, the new strategic plan is being devised with the realization that in order to achieve sustainable development, the preservation of our biological resources must be mainstreamed into society at large, including our economic systems and markets.

As you can see, the draft elements of the new strategic plan dovetail with both existing elements of the GSPC and elements which need to be included beyond 2010. And indeed, COP10 in Nagoya will review a consolidated proposal for the update of the GSPC post 2010. Overall, an improved GSPC will be crucial for the success of the Convention's 2011-2020 strategic plan – and vice versa.

In this spirit, allow me to commend the Convention's partners in the GSPC – and botanic gardens in particular – for the excellent work they have done to date to preserve the diversity of plant life on Earth. At the same time, allow me to urge you to work still harder over the months and years to come.

In this task, we can draw inspiration from the wisdom of the Irishman Robert Lynd. He wrote: "There is nothing in which birds differ more from man than the way in which they can build and yet leave a landscape as it was before."

That is precisely what we must do, and what we must teach others to do: reduce our impact on the natural world and find ways to live in greater harmony with the great diversity of species that surrounds us. No task today is more important. As the slogan of the International Year reminds us: Biodiversity is life...biodiversity is our life.

Thank you for your kind attention.