



MESSAGE

BY AHMED DJOGHLAF

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

on the occasion of the

WORLD DAY TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION

17 June 2010

This year's World Day to Combat Desertification, taking place during the 2010 International Year of Biodiversity, has a theme which is both important and timely: "Enhancing soils anywhere enhances life everywhere."

It is important because healthy, biodiversity-rich soils are essential to the functioning of natural ecosystems and play a central role in the sustainable management of agricultural systems. Soil organisms are the primary drivers of nutrient cycling: they regulate organic-matter formation, carbon sequestration and greenhouse-gas emissions, modify the physical structure and water regimes of soils, and enhance the efficiency of nutrient acquisition by plants.

It is timely because we are facing a crisis: during the last thirty years nearly one quarter of the world's land area has experienced a decline in primary productivity, including 20 per cent of cultivated areas and 10 per cent of grasslands. Ninety-five per cent of North American grasslands have already been lost. Between 2002 and 2008, the *cerrado*—the exceptionally diverse woodland/savannah biome of central Brazil—was estimated to have lost more than 14,000 square kilometres per year, well above the current rate of loss in the Amazon basin.

Moreover, such figures only stand to get worse with climate change. In the Succulent Karoo region of South Africa, 2,800 plant species face extinction if temperatures increase between 1.5°C and 2.7°C. The Cape Fynbos biome is projected to lose 65 per cent of its area if temperatures increase by more than 1.8°C, while increased temperatures may cause southern Europe to lose between 60 and 80 per cent of current species.

Farmers, governments and scientists are increasingly aware that desertification, biodiversity loss and declining soil fertility are major issues with widespread implications for global food security and day-to-day livelihoods. For example, agriculture and agricultural biodiversity account for 20 to 60 per cent of national gross domestic products in Africa, with



Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity
United Nations Environment Programme
413 Saint-Jacques Street, Suite 800, Montreal, QC, H2Y 1N9, Canada
Tel : +1 514 288 2220, Fax : +1 514 288 6588
secretariat@cbd.int www.cbd.int



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most of this production taking place in dry and sub-humid lands; at the same time, almost half of these lands are vulnerable to desertification.

In response to such threats, the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) have established a cross-cutting initiative for the conservation and sustainable use of soil biodiversity. Its aim is to increase the recognition of the essential services provided by soil biodiversity across all production systems and to foster sustainable land management practices. The initiative is implemented within our programme of work on agricultural biodiversity with the support of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). It is also linked to our other major programmes of work under the Convention, particularly those on the biodiversity of mountains, forests and dry and sub-humid lands, with further linkages to cross-cutting issues such as climate change.

Raising awareness about the loss of soil biodiversity and its impacts on human well-being is particularly important in this 2010 International Year of Biodiversity, during which time the international community is striving to find solutions to the rapid and ongoing loss of our biological resources. This September, the United Nations General Assembly will for first time hold a high-level meeting to discuss the importance of biodiversity, its role in sustainable development and its role in the fight against climate change. In October, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, meeting in Nagoya, Japan, is expected to decide on a 2020 biodiversity target and a 2050 biodiversity vision as a part of a comprehensive post-2010 Strategic Plan for stopping biodiversity loss in the future.

It is also important that we identify opportunities for synergistic action on biodiversity loss, climate change and land degradation during 2010. This process is already under way at the level of the Rio conventions, which have together launched an Ecosystems and Climate Change Pavilion to allow Parties and organisations to profile activities linking biodiversity conservation, sustainable land management and climate change mitigation and adaptation, especially at national and sub-national levels.

This year, the Pavilion will be held during both the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Nagoya and the sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Cancun. It is also anticipated that the Pavilion will be held in 2011 at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, to be held in the Republic of Korea, and at the seventeenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, in South Africa, with its momentum carrying through to the 2012 United Nations (Rio +20) Conference on Sustainable Development in Brazil.

Ultimately, preserving the integrity of our soils and protecting biodiversity are absolutely essential to human prosperity on planet Earth. During this 2010 International Year of Biodiversity, let us therefore individually and collectively do all we can to ensure that we pass on a rich, productive and stable home to our children and grandchildren.
