



STATEMENT

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CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

ON THE OCCASION OF

THE EUROPEAN YOUTH PERSPECTIVE CONFERENCE ON
BIODIVERSITY

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Dear leaders of tomorrow,

On 17th May at the London Zoo, the Secretariat in partnership with Airbus foundation released the results of a survey of more than 10,000 children and young people from ten countries worldwide, examining their perceptions of nature. The results did not bode well for the future of life on Earth. When asked to rank what was most important to them, ten times more youth ranked watching TV or playing computer games first compared to those who chose saving the environment – 40 percent and 4 percent respectively. Moreover, 15 percent – almost one out of seven – did not know what the term ‘endangered species’ meant. In September last year a similar survey of 1,500 children from the United Kingdom was released. 30 percent of the interviewed children were not able to tell the difference between a wasp and a bee, some even some confusing it with a fly.

The nature deficit gap of the next generation, the leaders of tomorrow, is real. I would like therefore to play tribute to the organizers of this important meeting on the European youth perspective on biodiversity. Needless to say, those of you at this conference belong not only to the 85 percent who definitely know what endangered species are, but also to the 4 percent who prioritize saving Nature. You know that we humans depend on biodiversity for so important many things – you know that plants and animals provide us with the food we eat and the medicines that heal us; that trees give us the lumber we use to make buildings; that forests and wetlands purify the water we drink and the air we breathe.

You also know that the world’s biodiversity is rapidly being lost: every day a few more species go extinct because we are cutting down forests, overfishing, releasing pollutants into lakes and rivers, and changing the climate through the chemicals we are putting into the atmosphere.

Although you did not create this situation, it is you who will suffer the most if we continue to lose life on Earth. I applaud you for your foresight in coming to this conference, for doing your part to make sure that you and future generations can prosperously live out your lives on a rich and stable planet.

Let me ask you to go one step further, to reach out to the 96 percent of youth in the Airbus survey who did not see the deep urgency of saving Nature. Let me ask you to do all you can to engage your peers, for we cannot win the battle for life on Earth without the full commitment of those whose opinions matter the most – you, the next generation, who must live on this planet when those who have so thoughtlessly degraded it are gone.

Of course you will not be alone in this task. Many of us are committed to raising awareness and fostering engagement to save life on Earth, including we at the Convention on Biological Diversity, the international treaty devoted to preserving the world’s biodiversity. Indeed we support an international initiative called *The Green Wave*, which aims to give young people hands-on experience with biodiversity preservation.

Every year youth in schools and groups worldwide plant a tree at 10 a.m. local time on 22 May—the International Day for Biological Diversity—creating a “green wave” across time-zones. This year’s Green Wave was a great success, having seen the involvement of thousands of students from more than 1000 schools and groups across 60 countries, including many in Europe: Belgium, Iceland, the UK, Slovakia, Slovenia, Germany, France and Portugal, to name just a few. The same day Mr Jean Lemire, a Canadian explorer and filmmaker, was appointed ambassador of the Green Wave campaign.

The engagement of the youth is vital for the success of this 2010 International Year of Biodiversity. Momentum is building at the political level. On 22 September a High-Level Event on biodiversity with the participation of the world's 192 heads of state and government will be held in New York as part of the 65th session of the UN General Assembly. It will be the first time ever discuss the UNGA will discuss at the level of heads of state the importance of biodiversity, its role in sustainable development, and its role in the fight against climate change. I can assure you that the voice of youth will be heard at the opening of this historical meeting. The voice of youth will be also heard at the Nagoya biodiversity Summit to be held in October with the expected participation of more than 10,000 participants representing the 193 Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity and their partners. The Nagoya meeting will finalize a comprehensive strategy for the stopping biodiversity loss in the future, including a 2020 biodiversity target and a 2050 biodiversity vision. This strategy will require the full engagement of youth. 2010 is also the International Year of Youth. It is therefore your year.

There is a Native American proverb that says, "We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children." Never forget that it is your right to repeatedly ask your parents and elders: In what condition are you returning the planet you have borrowed from us? How do you expect us to live on a planet stripped of its richness?

No one has the right to gamble away your future for short-term gain. Now is the time for you and your peers to raise your voices and speak out for life on Earth. Now is the time for you to loudly proclaim: Biodiversity is life...biodiversity is OUR life.

Thank you for kind attention, and good luck with the conference.