



MESSAGE FROM AHMED DJOGHLAF, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY, ON THE OCCASION OF THE INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY, 12 AUGUST 2010

Today is a day of celebration for youth, but it is also my hope that it will be a reminder of the central place of young people as bearers of tomorrow's solutions. Today is also the first day of the International Year of Youth, a year of opportunity for the young people of the world to speak their mind, together, and take action to help make the planet a healthier place.

Humans depend on biodiversity for survival and well-being, including food, medicine, and shelter. Every person in the world needs these things and we must work together in order to make sure that we maintain sustainable levels of biodiversity. Young people, the future stewards of our fragile planet, need to be fully engaged in protecting and preserving our life on Earth. For this to happen, we need to strengthen the opportunities for them to become actively involved in the decision-making of government-supported organizations and NGOs, thus making this year's theme—Dialogue and Mutual Understanding — even more relevant.

Children and young people represent more than half of the world's population, and more than 80% of the population in developing countries. The richest levels of biodiversity are located in those countries, so you can see that the link between nature stewardship and youth is quite strong. In contrast, by 2050, two thirds of the world's population will be living in urban settings. Currently, children living in cities are becoming increasingly disconnected with nature. In order to ensure that future generations will continue to appreciate ecosystem services, it is essential to bring youth closer to nature through education and hands on experiences.

Ultimately, we need to make sure that environmental education of some sort is being conducted every day throughout the planet. We need to train a generation of decision and policy makers to be environmental stewards. Although each level of society is responsible for the environmental integrity of the community, young people have a special interest in maintaining a healthy environment as they will inherit it

The recently released third edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook provides ample evidence that human activity is putting such a strain on the Earth's natural functions and that the ability of the planet's ecosystems to sustain future generations can no longer be taken for granted. 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 our young people are not responsible for this situation, they will be left with the consequences if we continue to



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lose life on Earth. The overlapping International Year of Biodiversity and International Year of Youth offer a unique opportunity for young people to fight for the protection of biodiversity and to paint the canvas of their future.

The Convention on Biological Diversity is committed to raising youth awareness and encouraging young people to get involved in the solution. 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 *The Green Wave* celebrations were a great success, having seen the involvement of thousands of students from more than 2500 schools and groups across 63 countries. 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 in conjunction with the sixty-fifth session of the United Nations General Assembly. It will be the first time ever for the General Assembly discuss the importance of biodiversity discuss at the level of Heads of State and Government.

In 2010, several events will provide young people with the opportunity and resources to get involved in biodiversity protection. Starting on 31 July, the fifth World Youth Congress on Youth and Development is being held in Istanbul. The Congress will focus on the culture, sustainable development, as well as the importance of working collectively for the common good. Furthermore, The International Youth Conference on Biodiversity, taking place in Japan in August, aims to encourage young people to contribute to the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity by organizing various discussion forums, including one on biodiversity. At the same time, Mexico City will host the World Youth Conference, with the objective to identify priorities of action for youth to be dealt with on the international development agenda beyond the Millennium Goals. The voice of youth is not only the voice of the future, it is also the voice of the present for the preservation of the future. We must engage in a dialogue with one another, young and older generations, for the protection of life on Earth.

If young people decide to take the place they deserve in society as the primary stewards of a fragile planet, it will be impossible for them to neglect the value of just and harmonious human relations. Ryunosuke Satoro once said, “Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean”. Let us, individually and collectively, seize this opportunity for the sake of current and future generations as biodiversity is life, biodiversity is our life.
