



**Convention on
Biological Diversity**

**INTERNATIONAL YEAR
OF FORESTS • 2011**



**MESSAGE OF AHMED DJOGLAF,
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
ON THE OCCASION OF AFRICA ENVIRONMENT DAY
3 March 2011**

Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai has said: “In a few decades, the relationship between the environment, resources and conflict may seem almost as obvious as the connection we see today between human rights, democracy and peace.”

Today, Africa, like the world, stands at an important crossroads. In one direction, the road leads us along a path of development that produces wealth today, but leaves nothing but deforestation and degradation for our children.

In the other direction, instead we have an opportunity to harvest and nurture the environments that feed and clothe the people of Africa not only today, but those that will also do so in the future.

Last year, during the International Year of Biodiversity, the world was given a stark warning. Global Biodiversity Outlook 3, the flagship report of the Convention on Biological Diversity, drawing on the expertise of scientists from around the world, and mobilizing the best information from national reports, warned that our way of doing business would lead to tipping points beyond which the rich ecosystems that sustain us, would collapse, leaving us all poorer.

The time for choice is now. The actions that we take in the next decade will determine the fate of biodiversity for hundreds, if not thousands of years to come.

This is why the global community took the first steps towards a sustainable future. This year, the United Nations Decade for Biodiversity begins. The Decade is our opportunity to integrate policies and practices into all aspects of our lives that can guarantee the conservation and sustainable use of the biodiversity of Africa, all while ensuring that the benefits from the use of genetic resources are shared with equity.

Moreover, the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification has also just begun. Since biodiversity loss and desertification are deeply interlinked, both Decades will draw upon commitments made by governments at the Aichi Nagoya Biodiversity Summit in October 2010. At that meeting, a global strategy for living in harmony with nature into the future was secured with the participation of all stakeholders, including the climate change and desertification communities. The Strategic Plan and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets will not only be the framework for action under the Convention on Biological Diversity, but with the endorsement of the United Nations General Assembly, has become the basis for all action on biodiversity at the international, regional and national levels.

Africa has a clear role in this – as a leader. Ministers of the environment last year, in Bamako, committed to these next steps. In the context of their commitments, the governments and citizens across this rich continent have the opportunity to create, update and implement National biodiversity strategies and action plans that mainstream the important role of biodiversity into all aspects of planning. The first in a series of a global programme of workshops to do this begins next week in Botswana. Through these, and through the follow-up, Africa will embrace this new model that integrates economic and environmental planning.



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Africa now has the tools needed to ensure a sustainable relationship with its rich ecosystems and biodiversity. The Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity, adopted last year, will become the most important legal instrument in the service of sustainable development. By providing the basis for clear and transparent rules on the exploitation of the genetic resources of our world, it will unleash the economic potential of the biodiversity of Africa in the service of sustainable development and the Green Economy. Today, Algeria and Rwanda have stepped up and signed. We look forward to signatures from across Africa that will put this new covenant into force.

2011 is the International Year of Forests. As repositories of 80 per cent of the terrestrial biodiversity of the world, these are among the most important sources of ecosystem services. Africa is home to over one sixth of the global forests, including some of the most significant large tropical rain forests of the world. Progress has been made to reduce deforestation and increase forest protection. Further actions taken will ensure that these living areas will continue to provide the basis for African livelihoods into the future. In this first year of the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity, I urge you to start here.

As the world begins its journey to sustainability, it needs someone to take the first steps. I look forward to walking with Africans, hand in hand, towards a future of living in harmony with nature.