



Convention on
Biological Diversity

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MESSAGE FROM AHMED DJOGHLAF
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL
DIVERSITY

on the occasion of

WORLD WATER DAY 2011

“Water for cities: responding to the urban challenge”
22 March 2011

As our already crowded planet moves further into the twenty-first century, the security of water supply for our growing cities is among our greatest concerns. We know now that by 2050, about half of the world will be living under extreme water stress with demand outstripping supply.

Cities are already being affected, with reports of water shortages becoming ever more prevalent. This is not surprising, since today over half of the world’s population lives in cities, a proportion that is expected to rise to 60 per cent by 2030. Cities require a very large input of freshwater, for consumption as well as for industrial processes. Cities are also very vulnerable to extremes in water caused by floods and drought, which are expected to intensify with climate change. This is particularly worrying for developing countries, where 95 per cent of future urban population growth is expected to take place. They will need mechanisms and the infrastructure to ensure a secure water supply.

Fortunately, maintaining the integrity of the rich ecosystems such as forests and wetlands which surround cities is a cost-effective way to ensure water security and water quality. By effectively managing biodiversity, cities will be better able to protect valuable water supplies.

At its tenth meeting, held in Nagoya, Japan, in October 2010, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity recognized the role of urban authorities in the implementation of the Convention and the crucial role that ecosystems and biodiversity play in achieving a sustainable water supply for urban populations.

Ecosystems underpin water security in terms of both the quantity and quality of available water, as well as in protecting populations against water-related natural disasters. In 2010, the Convention Secretariat produced two publications on the role of biodiversity in the supply of clean drinking water and on the role of forests and wetlands in ensuring adequate water supplies.

The negative impacts of cities on water, through, for example, pollution, are well known and must be addressed. But there is also a more positive side to the story. To take but one example, cities are a major driving force for investments in ecosystem protection and restoration so as to retain drinking-water supply and reduce flood risk.



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A recent study estimated that about 40 per cent of cities obtain their water from protected areas. China, for example, has recently announced major increased investments in environmental protection and ecosystem restoration, driven largely by the need to better sustain water to meet its aspirations for sustained economic growth.

The economics of this subject are staggering. A recent report estimates that OECD countries (together with Brazil, the Russian Federation, India and China) currently spent about \$750 billion per annum on water infrastructure. Most of this is in fact a legacy of our history of degrading ecosystems and losing services they originally supplied for free. All of these countries are starting to shift towards a better partnership with nature in terms of meeting their water needs, and saving money in the process. For most developing countries, which lack sufficient financial resources, this is their only sustainable option.

Building better partnerships between cities, nature and stakeholders across all levels is the key to achieving sustainable cities. The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its Aichi Biodiversity Targets, adopted at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, create an international framework for addressing this important need. We are proud today that, by helping the world to come together at all levels to save nature, we are making significant progress towards meeting our common challenge of ensuring a stable water supply for all.
