



**Convention on  
Biological Diversity**

**INTERNATIONAL YEAR  
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**STATEMENT BY AHMED DJOGLAF  
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL  
DIVERSITY**

*on the occasion of*

**WORLD HEALTH DAY 2011  
6 April 2011**

Health is our most basic human right and therefore one of the most important indicators of sustainable development. For most people, health does not just mean freedom from illness, but a state of overall social, emotional, physical, spiritual and cultural well-being.

It is therefore critical to understand that biodiversity underpins ecosystem functioning and the provisioning of ecosystem services essential for human health.

Biodiversity is the foundation for ecosystems which ultimately underlie food security, the provisioning of clean air and fresh water, medicines, climate stabilization, contributions to local livelihoods and economic development, as well as cultural and spiritual values.

You cannot have healthy societies without healthy ecosystems. Environmental risk factors for human health often act in concert and their effects are exacerbated by adverse social and economic conditions. The poorest and most marginalized, and particularly children, suffer first and most severely when the environment is degraded.

For example, each year at least three million children under the age of five die due to environment-related diseases.

And yet, despite the overwhelming weight of evidence, the enormous range of natural solutions and health benefits which biodiversity provides is largely underappreciated, remaining unknown to most policymakers and to the public at large.

The need for immediate action is likewise underappreciated. The third edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook, published in 2010, concluded that current trends are bringing us closer to a number of potential tipping points that would catastrophically reduce the capacity of ecosystems to provide the essential ecosystem services upon which we all so fully depend for our health, with profound and damaging consequences for ecosystems, economies and livelihoods.

World Health Day is an opportunity to recognize the importance of passing on a healthy planet to our children – biodiversity is a unique and irreplaceable foundation for health for all.



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](mailto:secretariat@cbd.int) [www.cbd.int](http://www.cbd.int)



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Citizens need to be fully informed of the linkages between human health and biodiversity as their voices and concerns can urge policymakers to act with the required sense of urgency.

Fortunately, the process of making a change for the better has begun. At the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, in October 2010 in Japan, the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted a Strategic Plan for Biodiversity as a common framework for action by all stakeholders in all sectors for the period 2011–2020.

The linkages between biodiversity and health are acknowledged in the Strategic Plan, including in the 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets. Target 14, for example, states that “by 2020, ecosystems that provide essential services, including services related to water, and contribute to health, livelihoods and well-being, are restored and safeguarded, taking into account the needs of women, indigenous and local communities, and the poor and vulnerable”.

We are proud to join with our partners and supporters in being part of the changes as we must all be a part of activities to reconnect biodiversity with human health.

There are tremendous opportunities for synergy between the work under the Convention on Biological Diversity and the World Health Organization. The five target areas of work in the Global Plan of Action for Children’s Health and the Environment 2010–2015 strongly support the Convention’s mandate and they make reference to multiple links with environmental protection, climate change and more.

With the critical implications of biodiversity loss becoming increasingly clear, we must act now and collectively if we want to achieve a healthy planet for healthy people.

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