



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Message from Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of the International Biological Diversity Day

22 May 2011

This 2011 *International Biological Diversity Day* marks the launch of the *United Nations Decade on Biodiversity*. This is chance for all of us to reaffirm the importance of biodiversity and join forces for its preservation.

Every day tells us the story of the importance of biodiversity. Biodiversity is the foundation for healthy ecosystems and sustainable human development. It touches on most parts of our lives -- from our security to our welfare, from our social relations to our health.

Every passing day sees also the rise of new threats and challenges. Since 1970, vertebrate species at the global level have declined by 30 percent. Those in tropical regions have decreased by 60 percent. In temperate regions, we are observing a recovery of some 15 percent. Nonetheless, all vertebrate groups, especially amphibians, face increasing threats. Currently, only 1 percent of the marine environment is protected.

These facts are undeniable. Habitat fragmentation is hitting hard forests, wetlands and coastal ecosystems. The human impact on biodiversity, ecosystems and climate is growing.

The stakes are high. Preserving biodiversity is vital for the health of the planet and our societies. We must rise to the complexity of the challenge. To do so, we must target the underlying causes of the loss of biodiversity. These lie in unsustainable practices, insufficient education and information, development choices that do not take cultural values into account, and the misuse of science and technology. Poverty is an overarching driver of loss. Equity in biodiversity access and use is a rising moral imperative.

UNESCO works across its mandate in education, the sciences, culture and communication to preserve biodiversity.

This includes the biodiversity of forests, the theme of this *International Biological Diversity Day*. UNESCO has promoted the conservation of forest biodiversity over the last forty years in the context of its *Man and the Biosphere* Programme and its unique *World Network of Biosphere Reserves* – numbering 563 reserves in 110 countries. This work takes in also all of the natural sites of outstanding universal value, including forests, which are inscribed under the 1972 *World Heritage Convention*. We are working with countries belonging to the three major forest basins to formulate a cooperation agreement on concrete measure to preserve these vital ecosystems.

We work arm in arm with other United Nations agencies to take forward the *Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*, established in the landmark decision of the 65th United Nations General Assembly at the closure of the 2010 *International Year of Biodiversity*. This Platform will play a core role in furthering knowledge and identifying responses to promote forest biodiversity and biodiversity in general.

UNESCO embraces wholeheartedly the *Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2011-2020*, and we will work without relent for its success. I have launched a *UNESCO Biodiversity Initiative* to crystallise our work in education, science and culture for the preservation of biodiversity.

Our position is clear. Along with the challenge of climate change, the loss of biodiversity is humanity's main battleground for sustainability. We can win this battle. This requires our will and our unity – to reconcile the contributions of biodiversity to development while maintaining it for the current and future generations. This is the key message of the 2011 *International biological Diversity Day*.

Irina Bokova