



**MESSAGE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY,
DR. BRAULIO F. DE SOUZA,
ON THE OCCASION OF THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY: MARCH 8, 2013.**

On the International Women's Day, we at the Convention on Biological Diversity pay tribute to all women who, through their daily actions, contribute to conserving and sustainably using the biodiversity of our world, and in so doing, help provide protection from poverty and also sustain all life on Earth.

The preamble of the Convention on Biological Diversity recognizes the vital role of women in achieving the objectives of the Convention, and goes on to affirm the need for the full participation of women at all levels of policy-making and implementation for the conservation of biological diversity. This call for participation is yet a way to provide women with the power they need to empower themselves and protect themselves from violence.

The principles reflected in the preamble to the Convention are particularly important for Indigenous women, who, on a daily basis pass on their traditional knowledge and their love for Nature and Mother Earth in their communities. It is no mere coincidence that a person's primary language is referred to as his/her "Mother tongue". Women as Mothers, Grandmothers and Aunties pass on to future generations, through their traditional languages, an encyclopedic knowledge of their local environment and the very culture of their peoples. Relying on local biodiversity, it is women who are the food preparers, the keepers of seeds, the providers of shelter and protectors of children. Their actions mean the difference between the survival or disappearance of this important knowledge, as well as the difference between poverty and living well.

The loss of biodiversity, forest biodiversity for example, causes communities to lose the ability to access their food, medicinal plants, their culture resources and recreational activities, affecting their health and housing. This loss is felt disproportionately by women and girls, forcing them into the harshness of poverty.

Reflecting on the theme of this year's International Women's Day, we are reminded that Mahatma Gandhi once so eloquently said "poverty is the worst form of violence." Poverty leads to disempowerment, which can make women more vulnerable to violence and less able to respond. It is yet one more reason why gender based violence cannot be tolerated.

Therefore, issues related to the Convention on Biological Diversity such as forests, protected areas, climate change, traditional knowledge, genetic resources, biodiversity are very important for the empowerment of women. The participation of women in decision-making processes related to the management of these issues is essential, as it provides the sources of empowerment and inclusion that



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empowers women and gives them the tools and resources to organize themselves and to protect themselves from violence.

With the determination to promote the effective participation of women in processes related to biodiversity locally, nationally and internationally the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted the Gender Action Plan and the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its Aichi targets, including target 14, that explicitly asks that safeguarding biodiversity takes into account the needs of women.

The international community is engaged in a process to reverse the situation of accelerated loss of biodiversity. In this worthy mission I would like to invite everyone to work together, especially women, to achieve the goals of the 2020 Aichi Biodiversity Targets of “Living in harmony with nature.”

We all need to work together and the collaboration and cooperation of women is the foundation for this. In this regard, I want to pay a special tribute to the Indigenous Women's Network on Biodiversity who are active partners for the Convention, for their hard work in involving hundreds of indigenous women in active participation at the local, national and international implementation of the Convention on Biodiversity.

On behalf of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, I wish women of around the world a fulfilling celebration of the International Women's Day.

Montreal, 8 March, 2013