



**MESSAGE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE CONVENTION ON  
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

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*on the occasion of the*

**INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FORESTS**

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Forests sustain human well-being through a multitude of ecosystem services, including water purification, provision of oxygen, and spiritual and cultural benefits. For many indigenous communities, forest biodiversity is fundamental to their culture and identity.

Forests have an important role in climate change mitigation and adaptation, combating desertification and building resilience of ecosystems and people, including to natural disasters.

Globally, forests remove about 15 per cent of human-generated carbon dioxide emissions from the atmosphere every year. Tropical forests cool the Earth by evaporating immense volumes of water and creating clouds that reflect sunlight back into space. The Amazon rainforest alone releases around 8 trillion tonnes of water vapour to the atmosphere each year.

We mark the first occasion of the International Day of Forests as the world's forests are facing immense pressures. In the coming decade, we need to do nothing less than to reverse the trend of deforestation and forest degradation and begin to restore forests worldwide as to maintain the biodiversity of the world's forests for the well-being of present and future generations. The good news is that the international community has made the commitments to do so.

In October 2010, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted a new Strategic Plan for Biodiversity for the period 2011-2020, with twenty clear and measurable targets. Five of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets are particularly relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of forest biodiversity.

In Target 5, the international community aims to at least half, and where feasible bring close to zero, the rate of loss of all natural habitats, including forests. It also calls for a significant reduction in degradation and fragmentation.



**Convention on  
Biological Diversity**

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Target 7 aims that, by 2020, areas under forestry are managed sustainably, ensuring conservation of biodiversity.

Target 11 aims that at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas.

Target 14 aims that ecosystems which 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.

And Target 15 aims that, by 2020, ecosystem resilience and the contribution of biodiversity to carbon stocks is enhanced through conservation and restoration, including restoration of at least 15 per cent of degraded ecosystems.

Restoration is part of the plan for forests globally. Biodiversity of degraded forests can often be successfully restored if the factors that lead to forest degradation can be effectively controlled. Restored forest landscapes provide food, water, shelter and many other essential ecosystem services.

Intact forests can provide cost-effective “insurance” against the impacts of climate change. For example, nature can defend coastal communities against the effects of storms and natural disasters if coastal ecosystems are intact. Compared to hard infrastructure, such as seawalls and levees, restoring mangrove forests is much more affordable for protecting large coastal areas and requires less maintenance.

On this first International Day of Forests, let us see both the forests and the trees, appreciate their value to communities, and take the actions needed to ensure that they and their biodiversity remain healthy, resilient and rich for future generations.