



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

**MR. BRAULIO FERREIRA DE SOUZA DIAS**

**on the occasion of**

**WANGARI MAATHAI DAY**

**3 March 2014**

***“Youth – Healing the Earth: Environment. Education. Empowerment.”***

As we mark the 2014 Wangari Maathai Day and its theme, *Youth- Healing the Earth: Environment. Education, Empowerment*, we pay tribute to Wangari Maathai. Her rich legacy as a dedicated environmentalist, human rights activist and agent of change is an excellent basis to celebrate the energy, enthusiasm and dedication that youth bring to protecting our environment, including their work for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

Today’s youth comprise about 1.2 billion of the global population. With 200 million people aged 15-24, Africa has the youngest population in the world. Key agents for change, youth help shape social and economic development and challenge social norms and values. They are key actors in building the sustainable foundation of the world's future – the future we want.

Most of the world’s youth live in developing countries, where they tend to make up a large proportion of the population. Like all people, youth are dependent on the services provided by healthy ecosystems, including the provision of a safe water and food supplies and sanitation. At present, the global economic cost of biodiversity loss is between US\$1.35 and US\$3.1 trillion annually. Today’s youth will bear a large part of this economic burden, as will future generations unless we change our behavior. Therefore, youth have a vested interest in ensuring that biodiversity and the ecosystem services they provide are available for them in the future.

Youth are resourceful and creative and can take this knowledge and find new and innovative solutions to reduce biodiversity loss and contribute to educating others about the importance of biodiversity.

The sustainable use of biodiversity is a way to harness the tremendous richness of the continent and build a green economy that can enhance jobs and livelihoods. Biodiversity supports the world’s major industries like energy, agriculture, construction, pharmaceutical, to name but a few. Youth employment and well-being is therefore directly dependent on healthy ecosystems.

Thus education and training for our young people is crucial in order for them to participate actively in preserving and using sustainably biodiversity, as well as to understand the relationship between the long-



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term co-evolution of people, animal and plant species, and biological and cultural diversity. Education truly is empowerment. And through education comes positive change.

Youth represent hope, the hope for a better and more sustainable future. They also need to have an active voice in determining their future well-being.

To that end, the United-Nations Secretary-General's Five Year Action Agenda (2012-2017) invites the world to work with and for young people "by deepening the youth focus of existing programmes on employment, political inclusion, and education" amongst others. The Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) supports this call in the context of the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity. The Secretariat proudly supports the inclusion of youth and invites youth to join the Global Youth Biodiversity Network, a platform where youth can join forces to contribute to achievement of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, and realization of the goals of the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity.

But more than this, youth can and need to be engaged in immediate and practical efforts to protect the ecosystems of the world. For example, youth can and should be active in initiatives such as the Hyderabad Call for a Concerted Effort on Ecosystem Restoration. Like other actors, they have a role to play in the concerted and coordinated long-term efforts to mobilize resources and facilitate the implementation of ecosystem restoration activities on the ground for sustaining and improving the health and well-being of humans and all other species with whom we share the planet.

The Government of India, which currently serves as President of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD, launched the motto: "Nature protects if she is protected." Wangari Maathai's words reflect this when she once said, "Today we are faced with a challenge that calls for a shift in our thinking, so that humanity stops threatening its life-support system. We are called to assist the Earth to heal her wounds and in the process heal our own..."

Dr. Maathai has called on youth to, "commit themselves to activities that contribute toward achieving their long-term dreams. They have the energy and creativity to shape a sustainable future. To the young people I say, you are a gift to your communities and indeed the world. You are our hope and our future."

Let us take heed in those words and be inspired not by our ecological footprint, but rather by our ecological handprint – our conviction that we can make a difference through individual and collective actions towards a sustainable future. By inspiring and being inspired by young people engaged in protecting our planet and conserving our biodiversity, we will be that much closer to finding long-term solutions to the biodiversity challenges we face today.

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