



**MESSAGE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE
CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY,
BRAULIO FERREIRA DE SOUZA DIAS,
on the occasion of
INTERNATIONAL MOTHER EARTH DAY**

22 April 2016

“Trees for the Earth”

This year, International Mother Earth Day coincides with the signing ceremony for the Paris Agreement on Climate Change at UN Headquarters in New York, where world governments will demonstrate their commitment to meet the challenges of climate change. The signing of the agreement by so many governments, with some 155 countries expected to attend the signing ceremony, provides optimism for our ability to take the necessary steps to change how we live on this Earth.

In celebrating International Mother Earth Day, we pause to reflect on the importance of the world’s forests, not only for mitigating and adapting to climate change, but also for their vital contribution to biodiversity conservation and human well-being. All of humanity relies on the abundant natural resources and ecosystems services that forests provide.

The important role played by trees in combating climate change is widely recognized. Forests help regulate the Earth’s climate by storing nearly 300 billion tonnes of carbon in their living part, thus reducing greenhouse gases, like carbon dioxide (CO₂), in the atmosphere. Complex and old-growth forest ecosystems sequester and store high amounts of carbon. While deforestation and forest degradation cause an estimated 17.4 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, it is important to remember that the world’s forests are a large and persistent carbon sink –sequestering an estimated 2.4 + 0.4 gigatonnes of carbon per year for the period 1990–2007. Forests also help people adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change, including extreme weather events, for example, through the maintenance of nutrient and water flow, the prevention of landslides, and as mitigation against natural catastrophes such as floods and droughts.

Moreover, forests regulate water flow and rainfall, a critical role humans depend on to grow crops and food. This is essential for food security as the loss of forest in one part of the world can have severe impacts in another.



**Convention on
Biological Diversity**

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 www.cbd.int



Trees help us to provide habitat for biodiverse species, as forests harbour approximately three-quarters of all terrestrial plant and animal species, the majority in tropical forests. Biodiversity underpins most natural processes and thus the provision of forest goods and ecosystem services. Forest ecosystems tend to be naturally resilient – that is, they can resist change and recover to a given condition following a major disturbance – and there is a close relationship between ecosystem resilience and forest biodiversity.

An estimated 1.6 billion people use forests as sources of livelihoods and income, for example by gathering building materials, fruits, nuts, mushrooms, honey and medicinal plants, harvesting wood, for fuel wood, grazing livestock and hunting game. Forests are also sources of genetic material for horticultural crops and trees, which can contribute significantly to household incomes. Moreover they employ millions of people in both the formal and informal labor force.

Many indigenous peoples and local communities that live in, and have customary rights to, their forests, have developed ways of life and traditional knowledge that are attuned to their forest environments. Forests provide indigenous peoples and local communities, as well as others, with the food and medicines necessary for human well-being.

But, in order to maintain the capacity of trees to deliver essential goods and services, it is important to manage forest sustainably. Target 15.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) captures the importance of promoting the sustainable management of all types of forests and, in many cases, enhance the socio-economic contributions they offer mankind. The successful implementation of sustainable forest management (SFM) requires enabling conditions that prioritize the long-term benefits of forests and SFM over short-term gains. The first steps in incorporating the multiple benefits of forests in decision-making, is to recognize their full values, as often times the nontangible values go unaccounted for, and to establish synergies and coordinated actions across sectoral. The links between forests and other SDGs are also paramount to human well-being.

As we celebrate International Mother Earth Day, it is virtually impossible to sum up the importance of trees and forests in just a few words. Trees are essential to support life on Earth as we know it. Let us take action for the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of forests in order to ensure that they continue to provide the vital products and services so necessary to the lives of billions of people around the world.
