



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

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on the occasion of

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

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'Connecting People to Nature'

Reconnecting ourselves to nature is sometimes easier said than done. Many of us live in cities full of concrete and use devices such as smartphones and laptops that, while connecting us to other people, often serve to disconnect us from the simple wonders of the natural world.

And yet, several recent studies have concluded that those who are more connected to nature experience greater positivity, vitality and life satisfaction compared to those less connected to nature. A number of studies link biodiversity exposure to improved health and wellbeing.

That should not come as a surprise. Biodiversity matters for a lot of reasons. It matters for livelihoods. The evidence is clear on that. Biodiversity and healthy ecosystems provide the essential goods and services necessary for human survival. This includes food security, dietary health and resources for medical research. Biodiversity matters for our future.

For this reason, the United Nations General Assembly has, since 2009, adopted nine consecutive resolutions on Harmony with Nature. The core of this worldview recognizes the intrinsic value of nature, and the necessity to promote harmony with nature in order to achieve a just balance among the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations.

In light of rapid biodiversity loss over the last decades, achieving this balance becomes especially important. Maintaining the essential services that biodiversity provides requires immediate action and the collective engagement of all parts of society – governmental agencies, non-governmental organisations and the private sector alike. Biodiversity conservation is a pre-condition for achieving sustainable development. Accordingly, biodiversity needs to be integrated into all sectors and across sectors and be part of our mainstream political discourse.

People also depend on biodiversity in ways that are not always apparent or obvious. We know that human health ultimately depends on the ecosystem products and services – fresh water, food and fuel sources – required for human wellbeing and productive livelihoods. But a healthy biodiversity also provides us with a variety of social benefits, such as tourism and recreation. Thus it is intuitive that biodiversity and human wellbeing should be part of any conceptual framework that informs sustainable development.

On a recreational level, nature can offer us a respite from our hectic lives. A chance to unwind and reenergise. Protected areas, such as national parks, nature reserves and marine sanctuaries play a crucial role in maintaining a healthy environment for both people and nature.



To that end, Canada, the official host of the 2017 World Environment Day celebrations, is offering citizens free access to their 46 national parks for a year to encourage them to ‘connect with nature.’

The cornerstone of biodiversity conservation, protected areas are critically important. They provide valuable goods and services that contribute significant benefit to national economies. They contribute directly to the livelihoods of many of the poorest and most vulnerable people. They are also vital to the cultures and livelihoods of indigenous peoples and local communities.

Many protected areas are ‘biodiversity hotspots’. These areas are especially rich in endemic species and particularly threatened by human activities, and are crucial for slowing the downward spiral in the populations and variety of animals and plants. In many cases, they are also ideal places for hiking, fishing, or simply relaxing and enjoying the wonders of nature.

But, whether you live near a national park, a forest or a green space in the middle of a city, this day implores us all to go outdoors. Personal connections with the natural world are powerful. And, there are many simple things that we can do to enhance our surroundings and preserve our environment. For example, we can gather friends together and spend a few hours picking litter off a beach or a city park. Regardless of what we do, by exploring our natural environment, we learn to fully appreciate its beauty and the joys of being in contact with it.
