



New York, 22 September 2010 - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's remarks at the High-level Event on Biodiversity

Mr. President of the General Assembly,

Excellencies,

Heads of State and governments,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I commend the General Assembly for convening this High-Level Meeting.

Conserving the planet's species and habitats – and the goods and services they provide – is central to sustainable development and the Millennium Development Goals.

This year is not only the International Year of Biodiversity, it is the deadline by which the international community had pledged to substantially reduce the rate of biodiversity loss.

The 2010 target will not be met.

Indeed, as we see from the third Global Biodiversity Outlook issued by the Convention on Biological Diversity, the global decline in biodiversity is accelerating.

Science tells us that our actions have pushed extinctions to up to one thousand times the natural background rate.

The reason is simple: human activities. Yours, mine, everyone's.

The main causes include deforestation, changes in habitat, land degradation.

The growing impact of climate change is compounding the problem.

As with most emergencies, those hardest hit are the poor.

We have all heard of the web of life. The way we live threatens to trap us in a web of death.

Too many people still fail to grasp the implications of this destruction.

They do not see why we need to preserve an obscure frog here, an endangered owl there.

Many still think the Earth is ours to use as we like.

This argument betrays a woeful ignorance of the importance of ecosystems to our well-being as a species, to climate regulation, to water supplies, to food security.

In this International Year, we need to demonstrate the concrete benefits of investing in biodiversity.

Ecosystem services are directly linked to the bottom line. They are our natural capital.

We need to show that protecting ecosystems can help us achieve the Millennium Development Goals and build resilience to climate change.

All over the world, ecosystem services are a massive undervalued subsidy provided by the environment.

When we lose these services through mismanagement, crops fail, profits drop, people become poorer, economies suffer.

Think of the human cost of deforestation in countries such as Haiti and Ethiopia, or the dustbowl in this country in the 1930s.

Last year's financial crisis was a wake-up call to governments on the perils of failing to oversee and regulate complex relationships that affect us all.

The biodiversity crisis is no different. We are bankrupting our natural economy. We need to fashion a rescue package before it is too late.

Next month, the 193 Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity will meet in Nagoya, Japan.

They will adopt a new Strategic Plan on biodiversity and a 2050 biodiversity vision.

This overarching international biodiversity framework is the result of a comprehensive and inclusive two-year process.

It calls for concrete national targets before Rio+20, the engagement of all stakeholders, and the inclusion of biodiversity considerations across all sectors of the society.

It includes means of implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

And it will address the important issue of access to genetic resources and the equitable sharing of the benefits derived from them.

It is a solid plan, on paper. But it will need leadership to bring it to life.

Not just from environment ministers but from finance and planning ministers, economic production and transport ministers, health and social welfare ministers.

Moreover, we must stop thinking of environmental protection as a cost.

It is an investment that goes hand-in-hand with the other investments that you, as Heads of State and Government, must make to consolidate economic growth and human well-being in your countries.

Maintaining and restoring our natural infrastructure can provide economic gains worth trillions of dollars each year.

Allowing it to decline is like throwing money out of the window.

I urge all leaders present today to commit to reducing biodiversity loss.

This will be your legacy – your gift to generations to come.

Thank you very much.