Secretariat of the
Convention on Biological Diversity

Achieving the
2010
Biodiversity
Target

CBD

STATEMENT BY

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CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

TO

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THE IMPORTANCE OF SCIENCE IN THE ARAB WORLD FOR ACHIEVING THE 2010 BIODIVERSITY TARGET

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Distinguished participants,

The scientific revolution that has been unfolding in the West for the past 500 years has its roots firmly planted in the Arab world. From the 8th to the 14th centuries, science flourished in the Arab world in every field, including medicine, mathematics and astronomy. Arabic, not English, was the *lingua franca* of science in this period. To name but one eminent scientist, physician and philosopher Ibn Sina (980-1037) penned the Canon of Medicine that became a standard in medieval Western Europe for centuries. Today, Arab countries, even though they now lag behind part of the rest of the world in terms of scientific training and output, have been witnessing promising increases in all fields of scientific publications, which more than tripled in the last 20 years.

And yet, the vast potential contribution of the Arab world to biodiversity science is needed today more than ever. Several recent studies have unequivocally concluded that the diversity of life on our planet is declining rapidly and that this loss will have far-reaching implications for human well-being. Biodiversity, the variety of life on Earth, plays an essential role in promoting sustainable development and poverty alleviation. Biological diversity forms the basis for our food supply, it is the source of medicines on which health care depends, and it provides raw materials for industry, as well as a vital range of ecosystem services, from air purification to water filtration, from climate stabilization to flood control. The rich variety of biological resources and the interactions between them are not a luxury; they are vital for the development and growth of human societies and for the very existence of life on Earth.

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, a four-year endeavour by more than 1,395 experts from 95 countries, found that 15 out of 24 assessed ecosystem services that make a direct contribution to human well-being were in decline. It concluded that the loss of biodiversity, which has been more rapid over the past 50 years than at any time in human history, will continue, or even accelerate. The IUCN 2004 Global Species Assessment revealed that 12% of all bird species, 23% of all mammal species, 32% of all amphibians and 34% of all gymnosperms are threatened with extinction. The situation for lesser-known taxonomic groups may be equally severe or even worse. The WWF 2006

Living Planet Report recently concluded that we have been exceeding the sustainable limits of the planet for the past 20 years. Our consumption of natural resources exceeds the Earth's ability to regenerate by about 25%. Ecosystems are suffering, the global climate is changing, and the further we continue down this path of unsustainable consumption and exploitation, the more difficult it will become to protect and restore the biodiversity that remains.

Biodiversity loss has tremendous implications for our economy, human well-being and security. It jeopardizes global food security, human health, energy security and our supply of fresh water. It is also rendering us increasingly vulnerable to natural shocks and surprises. What is more, the poor in the developing world suffer disproportionately from biodiversity loss, as their livelihoods depend directly on the continued delivery of ecosystem goods and services. For instance, according to the World Resources Institute, ecosystems contributed between 30 and 55% of total household income in Africa in 2005. In the Middle East and North Africa, at least 40 million people rely on biodiversity resources to maintain their livelihoods, and drylands, which are particularly vulnerable to biodiversity loss, account for some 90% of this region.

This loss of biodiversity is the raison d'être of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The Convention, which came into being at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and today has 189 Parties, is recognized as the key instrument for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. It seeks to stop the unprecedented loss of the natural resource base on which life on Earth depends and to alleviate poverty by integrating conservation and economic development and by ensuring that the benefits of biodiversity continue to flow and are shared equitably.

In 2002, at the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on Biological Diversity, the international community recognized the magnitude of the looming biodiversity crisis and set a global target of achieving by 2010 a significant reduction in the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level. Two years later, at the seventh meeting of the COP, a framework of goals

and sub-targets—an ambitious "to-do list"—was adopted to guide the international community toward the target. Since then, a set of global indicators has been developed to measure progress. Included among the sub-targets are: increasing coverage of protected areas, decreasing the deposition of nitrogen in agricultural production, increasing water quality in aquatic ecosystems, controlling invasive alien species, protecting the health and well-being of communities who depend directly on local ecosystem goods and services, and increasing official development assistance for developing country Parties in support of the Convention.

The responsibility to address biodiversity loss and achieve the 2010 Biodiversity Target—along with the need to curb climate change—is perhaps the most fundamental challenge facing humankind to date. It is a responsibility that demands that we take decisive actions and achieve tangible results to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the fair and equitable sharing of its benefits. To meet this challenge, developed country Parties to the Convention have committed themselves to assist developing country Parties to meet their obligations under the Convention. The decisions of the eighth meeting of the COP re-emphasize the need for the provision of financial resources, capacity-building, and transfer of technology and expertise.

Here is where you, distinguished participants, have the potential to play an important role. The science of biodiversity is complex and our knowledge is incomplete. The entire panorama of solutions to the biodiversity crisis is found in knowledge held by communities who live in ecosystems around the world. It is at the nexus of culture, language and the interaction of the communities of the Arab world with their environments, where we will find solutions. We look to you, the scientists of the Arab world, to continue to explore practical ways in which the international community can channel our scientific knowledge, refine, and develop it, to support a harmonized approach to meeting the 2010 Biodiversity Target and beyond.

I wish you a most successful and productive symposium.
