

**CONVENTION ON  
BIOLOGICAL  
DIVERSITY****PRESS RELEASE**

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**NEW INITIATIVES TO CONSERVE AND PROTECT EARTH'S  
AGRICULTURAL BIODIVERSITY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS**

*Montreal –23 June 2006*

Norway has launched the Svalbard International Seed Vault, which will act as a safety net in case seeds already stored in commercial gene banks are destroyed, or are decimated in a global catastrophe. Norway's "Noah's Ark" project aims to safeguard crop diversity by storing about 1.5 billion seeds, and three million varieties, in an underground vault on Svalbard Island in the country's Arctic archipelago.

"I applaud this initiative," said Mr. Ahmed Djoghlaif, the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity. "It will be remembered for generations to come as an example of intra- and inter-generational solidarity, and as an act of global environmental responsibility of major significance."

Mr. Djoghlaif also warmly welcomed the conclusions reached at the first session of the Governing Body of the International Treaty for Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, held in Madrid from 12 to 16 June, which concluded agreements to help enable the implementation of the Treaty for the benefit of plant genetic resource donors and users alike.

The ongoing decline in genetic diversity inevitably diminishes food security. One critical aim of the International Treaty is to conserve the remaining genetic diversity of cultivated plants, and to ensure that it is available to farmers and crop breeders worldwide. As stated by Mr. Djoghlaif: "The results of this historic meeting will make a major contribution to achieving the three objectives of the Convention and the 2010 biodiversity target, as well as the United Nations Millennium Development Goals."

Mr. Djoghlaif added that: "The completion of agreements for transferring genetic resources is particularly significant. As well as ensuring access to the genetic treasure house of the world's most important crops, it provides—for the first time—mandatory benefit-sharing through an international fund. Everyone should benefit from this landmark agreement."

These two major initiatives will also contribute to the implementation of the objectives of the Convention's programme of work on agricultural biodiversity, which will be reviewed by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention at its next meeting, to be held in Germany in the summer of 2008.

**Information for Journalists:**

The Convention on Biological Diversity is one of the most broadly-subscribed international environmental treaties in the world. Opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro Brazil in 1992, it currently has 188 Parties—187 States and the European Community— who have committed themselves to its three main goals: the conservation of biodiversity, sustainable use of its components and the equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources. The Secretariat of the Convention is located in Montreal, Canada.

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