



Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity



INTERNATIONAL
DAY FOR BIOLOGICAL
DIVERSITY
22 May 2008
**BIODIVERSITY
AND AGRICULTURE**

A GLOBAL APPROACH TO ALLOCATE LAND FOR NATURAL PRESERVATION

by

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and**

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Bonn (19 May 2008) - Throughout the ages, parcels of land have been shuffled about between tribes, clans, empires, and countries. One assemblage that may not come to mind, however, is the natural world. Indeed, one of the largest land allocations in history has been the designation of areas for protecting the millions of species that live on this planet. Every hour four species are lost. And these protected areas spanning 19 million square kilometers, covering an area the size of India and China combined, are truly an accomplishment to slow down the asset-stripping of the planet's natural capital.

Protected areas are not simply pretty patches cut off from the rest of the world for future use. They are actively managed natural spaces that provide invaluable services to humanity daily and represent 11.6 per cent of the Earth's land surface. By altering the land and ocean a little more each day to satisfy our daily needs and wants, we destroy the very resources that maintain our lives. Protected areas force us to limit the process of overdrawing on our natural capital.

The 100 per cent increase in the number of protected areas is one of the major outcomes of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), since its entry into force in 1993. Yet even with these achievements and the near universal character of this international agreement having 191 signatories, the CBD is still not very well known. We need to change that. Moreover, despite the success seen with establishing protected areas, we now need to make them more effective and to fill the existing gaps in the global net of protected areas.

Today is the beginning of the Ninth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 9) to the CBD that Germany is hosting in Bonn. This meeting expecting more than 5000 participants will focus on various environmental issues, including ways to optimise the efficiency of at least 30 per cent of the protected areas in each country by 2010 -- to start making a dent in the losses that we have been imposing on the natural world.

Protected areas, when carefully designed and managed, also contribute to poverty reduction. For example, the Maya Biosphere Reserve in Guatemala generates an annual income of US\$47 million and provides direct employment to 7000 people. There are over 100,000 protected areas on the planet. Maintaining these requires extensive public support. Yet, if the CBD does not have wide recognition, garnering this support is difficult. Luckily, COP 9 takes place during a time of exceptional public and political awareness of the importance of taking action to protect our environment.



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COP 9 MOP 4 Bonn Germany 2008



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While much has been achieved, there is still much to do. Only two years are left to reach the 2010 Biodiversity Target – a commitment made by Heads of State and Governments in 2002 to significantly reduce the rate of biodiversity loss that is now up to 1000 times greater than the natural rate. The survival of the millions of species stands at a pivotal point.

Let us draw upon the success of 191 countries allocating land for natural preservation to conserve biological diversity by forming a global alliance that ensures the protected areas receive the support they deserve for meeting the 2010 Biodiversity Target and work to fulfill all the three objectives of the Convention: conserving biological diversity, promoting its sustainable use and sharing the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources fairly and equitably. A successful first step has been taken and we now need the next step to improve environmental management at the national level for achieving the desired results on the ground, for every moment we lose another species is imperiled. Later is too late. Extinction is forever.