

CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

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Press Release

Statement by the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity to the Second Committee of the United Nations General Assembly

Montreal, October 16, 2003 – Today, Hamdallah Zedan, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), addressed the Second Committee of the UN General Assembly (Economic and Financial) as it began its consideration of environment and sustainable development.

Mr. Zedan's Statement briefly describes the activities of the CBD during the past twelve months and the challenges that lie before the Convention, including "what is perhaps the most fundamental ... how to achieve the internationally agreed target of reducing the current rate of biodiversity loss by the year 2010 and how progress toward that target should be monitored".

Recalling that this year marks the tenth anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Mr. Zedan underlined that the Convention has now entered into a new phase "of practical implementation as opposed to the previous phase, which consisted in the development of concepts and policy frameworks".

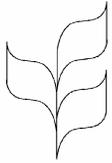
"A major shift has taken place in society's perception of biodiversity, which is now universally recognized as a crucial element in efforts to achieve sustainable development and poverty eradication", said Mr. Zedan, as he reviewed the past year's accomplishments. He pointed to the entry into force of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety as a major milestone and urged those countries that have not yet ratified the treaty to do so before 29 November in order that they may participate in the decision making of the first meeting of the Parties to the Protocol in February 2004, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Mr. Zedan reminded the General Assembly that the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP-7) will also be held in Kuala Lumpur in February 2004. While the issues to be considered in depth are: Mountain biological diversity, protected areas and technology transfer and technology cooperation, Mr. Zedan stated that it is expected that the Conference of the Parties will "concentrate on advancing the work programmes already under way, which address the various types of ecosystems and cover all the relevant cross-cutting issues".

Mr. Zedan concluded: "the commitments made in Johannesburg are progressively being translated into concrete action under the framework of the Convention. Progress toward the 2010 target and its measurement stand out as a key challenges for the Convention in the years to come. The active support of Parties and Governments, as well as international and non-governmental organizations, civil society and the scientific community provides reasons for optimism that the Convention will meet expectations and contribute significantly to sustainable development and poverty eradication".

For the full text of the Statement by Mr. Zedan to the Second Committee of the United Nations General Assembly please see: CBD Web site at: <http://www.biodiv.org/doc/press>

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**CONVENTION ON
BIOLOGICAL
DIVERSITY**

STATEMENT BY

**HAMDALLAH ZEDAN
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**

CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

TO

**THE SECOND COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
AT ITS FIFTY-EIGHTH SESSION**

New York, 16 October 2003

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished delegates,

I am honoured to have this opportunity to address the General Assembly.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The Convention now has 187 Parties, an almost universal membership. Much work has been done to monitor the global status of biodiversity and reduce its loss. The Parties have adopted and committed themselves to the implementation of work programmes on major biomes, from forests and agricultural biodiversity to the biodiversity of marine and coastal areas, inland waters and drylands. And many measures are already in place. The Convention's financial mechanism, operated by the Global Environment Facility, has channelled some US\$ 1.6 billion to developing countries for biodiversity-related projects and has leveraged an additional US\$ 1.6 billion through co-financing. A major shift has taken place in society's perception of biodiversity, which is now universally recognized as a crucial element in efforts to achieve sustainable development and poverty eradication.

The past year has been a fruitful one for the Convention on Biological Diversity. The report before you in document A/58/191 describes in some detail the results of the work undertaken in the aftermath of the World Summit on Sustainable Development with a view to ensuring that the Convention is well positioned to meet the target contained in the Plan of Implementation to reduce the current rate of biodiversity loss significantly by 2010, and to fully play its role as a key instrument to achieve sustainable development and eradicate poverty. These activities build on the growing awareness of the inextricable links between the objectives of the Convention and sustainable development.

The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety

A new milestone was reached, in September 2003, with the entry into force of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. The Protocol is the first legally binding instrument governing the transboundary movement of living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology that may have adverse effects on the environment. It aims at ensuring the safe transfer, handling and use of these products.

No less than 64 countries and one regional economic integration organization have ratified the Protocol to date. The pace of ratification is continuing to gather momentum as we approach the date of the first meeting of the Parties to the Protocol – the governing body that will make decisions regarding the implementation of the Protocol. In this connection, I wish to draw your attention to the fact that November 25 is the cut-off date for countries to ratify or accede to the Protocol in order to be represented as a Party and, thus, take part in decision-making at the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol, which will be held in Kuala Lumpur in February 2004.

It is crucial, of course, that as many countries as possible ratify the Protocol to ensure that the entire international community works together to implement its provisions as this is the only way to ensure that the objectives of safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms are reached. It is also critical that adequate assistance be made available to developing countries to allow them to develop or strengthen the necessary human and institutional capacities to comply with the provisions of the Protocol, especially in the areas of information-sharing and the Biosafety Clearing-House, risk assessment and risk management, in order to be able to make informed decisions on imports of living modified organisms.

Follow up to the WSSD

As we prepare for the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, which will also be held in Kuala Lumpur next February, significant progress is also being made with respect to other work programmes under the Convention, including on issues arising from the Plan of Implementation of the WSSD. For example, the question of how to follow up on the commitment made in Johannesburg to negotiate an international regime on access and benefit-sharing within the framework of the Convention was discussed at the Inter-Sessional Meeting on the Multi-Year Programme of Work of the Conference of the Parties up to 2010, held in March of this year, in Montreal. The Meeting requested the Open-ended Working Group on Access and Benefit-sharing, which will meet in December, to consider the process, nature, scope, elements and modalities of an international regime, and to provide advice to the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties on how best to follow up on this commitment.

The Inter-Sessional Meeting also recommended that the issue of biodiversity hotspots, ecological networks and corridors, also arising from the World Summit, be considered by the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) at its ninth meeting, in November this year. This issue will also be taken up by the Conference of the Parties at its seventh meeting.

Preparatory work is also under way with regard to other issues that emerged from the Johannesburg Summit.

Key issues include advancing the thinking on the linkages between the various work programmes of the Convention and the Millennium Development Goals in order to highlight how the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity can facilitate their achievement and to identify modalities to ensure the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals is consistent with the objectives of the Convention. Another key issue concerns the linkages between biodiversity and poverty reduction and the need for mainstreaming biodiversity targets into other strategies, economic and other sectoral policies.

Following up on the concept of partnerships, which was at the core of WSSD, the Inter-Sessional Meeting recommended that the Conference of the Parties request the Executive Secretary to develop a global partnership on biodiversity comprising the major biodiversity-related conventions and organizations; I stand ready, of course, to take action on this request in accordance with any request that could emanate from the Conference of the Parties when it meets in Kuala Lumpur.

2010-The Global Biodiversity Challenge

Mr. Chairman,

Work has also been initiated on what is perhaps the most fundamental challenge before the Convention: how to achieve the internationally agreed target of reducing the current rate of biodiversity loss by the year 2010 and how progress toward that target should be monitored. No-one underestimates the enormity of this challenge, which is also the centrepiece of the Convention's Strategic Plan. It is a daunting but essential task. It is one thing to make a commitment; it is quite another to deliver on it.

Achieving this target will require action at all levels with the involvement of all concerned stakeholders. There will need to be clear guidance from Governments on priorities for action. And mechanisms will need to be agreed upon and put into place to monitor progress and to identify areas where adjustments need to be made as we move towards 2010. Without a marked increase in funding and cooperation and coordination among all concerned, it will be not be possible to achieve a reduction in biodiversity loss and to measure progress towards this aim.

In this connection, the Secretariat of the Convention in partnership with the World Conservation Monitoring Centre of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP-WCMC) convened a meeting of experts, in April 2003, to articulate a framework for action. The meeting *inter alia* reviewed approaches for understanding and measuring biodiversity loss and examined the 2010 target in the context of other biodiversity-related targets. The need to provide objective and quantitative data and information on the rate of biodiversity loss was highlighted as a critical component of national and global efforts to achieve the 2010 target. One practical approach to achieve this would be to include the 2010 biodiversity target as an indicator to measure the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The meeting articulated a number of recommendations in this regard and, clearly, this whole issue of measuring and monitoring achievement of the 2010 target will be a very prominent issue at the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

The seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties

As mentioned, the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties will be held in Kuala Lumpur, in February 2004, at the kind invitation of the Government of Malaysia. The issues for in depth consideration at the meeting are: Mountain biological diversity, protected areas and technology transfer and technology cooperation. It is expected that the Conference of the Parties will adopt work programmes in each of these areas based on the preparatory work carried out by the SBSTTA. The consideration of a programme of work on protected areas is very timely as it comes on the heels of the World Congress on Protected Areas held in Durban, South Africa, last September. As regards, technology transfer, it is a key cross-cutting issues that underpins all the thematic work programmes under the Convention.

The Conference of the Parties will also decide on the work programme for the Conference of the Parties up to 2010 in the light of the broader issues mentioned previously. The Conference of the Parties is not expected to add new themes to the agendas of its future meetings but to concentrate on advancing the work programmes already under way, which address the various types of ecosystems and cover all the relevant cross-cutting issues. This will confirm the new phase in which the Convention has now entered: that of practical implementation as opposed to the previous phase, which consisted in the development of concepts and policy frameworks.

Finally, I would like to re-emphasize that reaching the objectives of the Convention and the Biosafety Protocol is dependent on the availability of adequate funding, including new and additional funds, in support of efforts of developing countries as recognized in the WSSD Plan of Implementation. This factor is more relevant than ever.

Mr. Chairman,

In summary, the commitments made in Johannesburg are progressively being translated into concrete action under the framework of the Convention. Progress toward the 2010 target and its measurement stand out as a key challenges for the Convention in the years to come. The active support of Parties and Governments, as well as international and non-governmental organizations, civil society and the scientific community provides reasons for optimism that the Convention will meet expectations and contribute significantly to sustainable development and poverty eradication.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.