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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY  
22 May 2003

Biological diversity is a widely under-appreciated resource that is essential for human existence and has a crucial role to play in sustainable development and the eradication of poverty. Biodiversity provides millions of people with livelihoods, helps to ensure food security, and is a rich source of both traditional medicines and modern pharmaceuticals. Biodiversity also provides basic ecological services on which all life depends. Unless we stop the loss of biological resources, our efforts to reach the Millennium Development Goals by the 2015 will be that much more difficult, if not impossible.

In advance of last year's World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, I identified biodiversity as one of five issues -- together with water, energy, health and agriculture as the so-called "WEHAB" areas -- on which real, concrete progress could be made. It was very encouraging to see that both during the preparatory process and at the Summit itself, biodiversity was given far greater prominence than it had received at previous major international forums.

At Johannesburg, Governments committed themselves to achieving a significant reduction in the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. To do so, however, will require concerted action on many fronts by many actors.

Governments that have not yet done so should ratify the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Biosafety Protocol. These instruments -- and the processes they have set in motion -- are crucial for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and for the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources. But ratification is only a start; Governments must also ensure that their national policies and, not least, their budgetary allocations, reflect their recognition of biodiversity's importance.

The preservation of biodiversity is not just a job for Governments. International and non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and each and every individual have a role to play in changing entrenched outlooks and ending destructive patterns of behaviour. The involvement of local communities is particularly important, since many have already devised innovative approaches in resource management and other areas from which others can learn.

Biodiversity is an essential heritage for all humankind. Stopping its loss, and guaranteeing the continued functioning of the earth's ecosystems -- both marine and terrestrial -- should be a high priority for everyone. On the International Day for Biological Diversity, let us pledge to promote global awareness of the value of biodiversity and do our utmost to generate momentum towards its preservation.