

**Notes for Opening Remarks of Hamdallah Zedan  
Vin d'honneur 21 May 2004**

Minister Robillard, Mme Berku, M. Bourgeault, members of the consular corps, distinguished guests, friends and colleagues.

Thank you for joining us today to celebrate the International Day for Biological Diversity, which, as you know, commemorates the adoption of the Convention text on May 22, 1992 by the Nairobi Final Act of the Conference for the Adoption of the Agreed Text of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

It would have been hard to imagine then how important Biodiversity and the Convention would become in the world's eyes, and how much progress would be accomplished only 12 years after the Nairobi Final Act, and only 10 years after the Convention entered into force.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Anan has affirmed that Biological Diversity is essential for human existence and has a crucial role to play in sustainable development and the eradication of poverty. The Millennium Development Goals, proclaimed by the United Nations Millennium Summit of 2000, establish the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger as the pre-eminent goal in responding to the most vital development needs. And these goals can only be met when biodiversity is conserved, used in a sustainable manner and the benefits from the use of genetic resources shared fairly and equitably.

In his message to the whole world tomorrow on the occasion of International Day of Biological Diversity, the Secretary-General states: *The consequences of failing to stop the loss of biodiversity are too awful to contemplate.*

Much of the Convention's progress in reaching its goals is due to the support and proactive commitment of the Parties, of which Canada is an outstanding example. Not only as the first industrialized nation to sign the Convention in Rio, but as host to the Secretariat, Canada, Québec and Montréal have proven to be steadfast friends to the Convention.

In this connection, I would like to take the opportunity, in the presence of this distinguished audience to pay special tribute to Dr. John Herity. As Director of the Biodiversity Office of Environment

Canada since 1991 – before the Convention came into being –, John has been a leading voice in the evolution of the Convention.

One month ago, John became Director of the IUCN Canada Office. On behalf of all of his CBD colleagues, I wish to recognize and thank John for his unflagging efforts on behalf of Biodiversity and to wish him continuing success and fulfillment in his new role with IUCN.

I understand that the Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada, the Honourable Lucienne Robillard, wishes to make an announcement of great importance to us all, I am therefore very pleased to invite her to speak now.