CBD

CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

Please Check Against Delivery

STATEMENT BY

HAMDALLAH ZEDAN
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

TO

THE FOURTH NORWAY/UN TRONDHEIM CONFERENCE ON TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Trondheim, Norway, 24-27 June 2003

Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be back in this historic city to attend the fourth Trondheim Conference on Biodiversity.

The various Trondheim meetings held over the years have made an important contribution to the work of the Convention process. They have brought together scientists and policy makers to address issues of major relevance. They have provided an opportunity for in-depth and focused discussions of prominent items under consideration within the Convention process. And they have served as a valuable preparatory forum for the Conference of the Parties to the Convention and its Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice. I am confident that this meeting will be no exception to this tradition.

The objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity, as stated in Article 1, are the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources. More broadly, however, the Convention has one single overriding objective, namely, the maintenance of the biological foundation on which sustainable development can be built. The Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development recognized unambiguously the critical role played by biodiversity in overall sustainable development and poverty eradication. It also recognized that the Convention is the key instrument for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from use of

genetic resources. In addition, the World Summit endorsed the existing programmes of work under the Convention and called for action to strengthen their integration into relevant cross-sectoral strategies, programmes and policies. This recognition of the importance of biodiversity and its centrality to efforts to achieve sustainable development and alleviate poverty was a major breakthrough that gives an added impetus and urgency to work under the Convention and the achievement of its objectives.

For those objectives to be achieved, technology transfer is essential. The central importance that Parties attach to technology transfer is underlined by the fact that no less than four articles of the Convention touch on the subject. Technology transfer is mentioned specifically as a means of achieving the equitable sharing of benefits from the use of genetic resources, one of the main objectives of the Convention. Moreover, at each of six meetings held to date, the Conference of the Parties has adopted decisions that confirmed the need for technology transfer and cooperation to successfully implement the provisions of the Convention.

However, there appears to be a considerable gap between what is recognized as important and what is being realized. The appropriate transfer of relevant technologies and the provision of training on their use are seriously hampered by a number of factors. They include the lack of adequate information on available technologies, a lack of established terms under which such a transfer should be made and, more generally, a lack of appropriate regulatory, financial and institutional frameworks. This meeting provides an excellent opportunity for a careful consideration of how these obstacles and constraints can be overcome.

The socio-economic and legal aspects of technology transfer have already been considered by the Parties to the Convention at the Inter-sessional Meeting on the Multi-Year Programme of Work of the Conference of the Parties, which took place in March this year. In November, the Convention's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice will look at practical examples of the types of technologies that are available and could be used by countries in the implementation of the various thematic programmes of work under the Convention.

On this basis, the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties will provide a forum for global consensus-building on issues related to technology transfer and the formulation of policies to enhance technology development and cooperation without contravening trade policies. The effectiveness of the resulting work programme will depend on the extent to which its elements are translated into governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental programmes.

There are many international institutions providing policy guidance on technology transfer in general. The Convention, however, focuses on specific challenges related to biological diversity, such as:

- Lack of capacity to absorb imported technology at the national level;
- Fear of failure to manage risks associated with new technologies;
- Limited market access and hence a lack of incentive for developing countries to invest in technological innovations;

- Lack of international technological alliances or partnerships beneficial to biodiversity-rich developing countries;
- Strong regimes for the protection of intellectual property;
- Need to reform policies on technology that were developed in the pre-globalization age;
- Lack of knowledge-based institutions.

The Convention is explicit on the types of technologies and capacity to which access needs to be facilitated: they should be relevant to the conservation or sustainable use of biological diversity or make use of genetic resources and should be environmentally sound.

A central role is attached to biotechnology. Article 19, which led to the negotiation of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, concerns the handling of biotechnology and distribution of its benefits. Many biotechnology techniques are available in the public domain and can be obtained through training programmes and information searches. Indeed, a number of developing countries have already taken advantage of these opportunities. Other biotechnologies are on offer, often from corporations that usually provide entire packages and discourage their modification and adaptation to local conditions—a key element of successful technology transfer.

The situation may be different when it comes to relevant technologies for the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable use of its components. There may be little economic incentive to transfer or acquire them. They are also not necessarily available on the market but need to be developed and refined locally. This includes particularly technologies

relevant for the management of ecosystems and populations and the rehabilitation and restoration of degraded areas. Tools related to surveying, mapping and monitoring are increasingly accessible but require a high level of expertise and institutional stability. In many developing countries the number of trained scientists in such areas is too low to readily fill the gap left by a specialist who moves on. The consequence is often that the use of expensive equipment and sophisticated techniques is discontinued.

Capacity-building efforts therefore need to ensure that a critical mass of people are trained and that their services are retained for extended periods of time. There is also a need to ensure that the necessary infrastructure is in place to maintain and, if possible, further adapt and develop the technologies transferred. In this respect, capacity-building efforts need to promote not only imitative skills but also innovative potential.

The World Summit on Sustainable Development called on governments, industry, the research community and civil society to engage in partnerships for the development and transfer of technologies that could contribute to a sustainable use of the world's resources. Such partnerships would have to be conducive to investment and technology development as well as their transfer and diffusion. In the case of biodiversity, there is a vast potential for partnerships based on clearly enunciated and mutually agreed trade-offs between access to resources and the sharing of benefits from their utilization. Indeed, the generation of income from the use of genetic resources at the source, for example in biodiversity hotspots, could provide a strong incentive for both conservation and sustainable use.

It is also important to consider the international mechanisms that can be put in place or built upon and to collect and disseminate information on

available technologies. Developing countries need to be able to monitor developments and identify technologies that may be useful for the promotion of the objectives of the Convention in their circumstances. They also need information on the means of acquiring them and the terms on which they may be made available. It would also be useful to exchange experiences on technology transfer and to compile easily accessible case-studies that can serve to highlight the success stories as well as possible constraints and pitfalls. In all these respects, I believe that the clearing-house mechanism under the Convention has a pre-eminent role to play.

Let me conclude by thanking the organizers once again for making the arrangements for us to come here. I look forward to a week of informative and stimulating discussion. I am sure that this meeting will live up to its reputation as an outstanding forum for the marriage of science and policy-making. And I am sure that your conclusions will, once again, be of great value to the Parties to the Convention in their quest for policy direction based on the soundest possible scientific advice.

I thank you for your attention.