



**CONVENTION ON  
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

**STATEMENT BY**

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**To the tenth session of the FAO Commission on Genetic  
Resources for Food and Agriculture**

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*Mr Director General,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I am honoured to have this opportunity to address the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture on the occasion of your twentieth anniversary.

Looking back over the past 20 years, one can see major developments in the fields of plant and livestock genetic resources as well as in the broader field of biodiversity. Even a shortlist of this Commission's achievements is impressive. To name just a few of them:

- The adoption of the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources in 1983;
- The agreement on Farmers' Rights in 1989;
- The elaboration of a code of conduct for collectors in 1993;
- The preparation of the first report on the state of the world's plant genetic resources for food and agriculture in 1996 (and now in progress is the first report on the state of the world's animal genetic resources for food and agriculture);
- The adoption of the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture at the Leipzig Conference in 1996. And, of course,
- The negotiation and entry into force in June this year of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.

During this same period, we have also seen the birth of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and its emergence as a comprehensive instrument for sustainable development. The Convention provides a framework for action for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, as well the equitable sharing of benefits from the utilization of genetic resources.

Much has been achieved under the Convention in the past twelve years. The Parties have agreed on programmes of work that cover all the world's major biomes. They have also developed guidelines and tools that will assist in the implementation of those programmes of work and, ultimately, in the achievement of the objectives of the Convention. Cooperative arrangements have been developed—at both the decision-making and technical levels—with a broad range of organizations, including FAO. The Convention process has also helped raise the profile of biodiversity at international, regional and national levels.

These two processes have been closely linked and, I believe, each has been reinforced through inputs from the other.

In this presentation, I would like to highlight a few examples of this interaction, and also to highlight some of the major challenges we now face together.

*Mr Chairman,*

The negotiation process for the Convention on Biological Diversity was launched by the UNEP Governing Council in 1987. The formal negotiations began the same year and were completed some five years later. The Convention text was adopted in May 1992 and opened for signature the next month, at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. It entered into force a little over a year later, in December 1993.

As a member of the Ecosystem Conservation Group, FAO provided invaluable inputs during the preparatory process for the Convention. These inputs were instrumental in broadening the focus of the Convention to go beyond a simple conservation treaty to become a more comprehensive instrument whose three objectives—conservation, sustainable use and equitable sharing of benefits—represent the three pillars of sustainable development.

At the same time, the adoption of the Convention, and, in particular, resolution 3 in the Nairobi Final Act and subsequent decisions by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, stimulated the re-negotiation of the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources and its eventual development into the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. The Conference of the Parties to the Convention took a keen interest in the process of developing the new Treaty and specifically addressed this matter at its second and every subsequent meeting.

The negotiation of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture is perhaps the biggest single achievement of this Commission, and I would like to congratulate you on the recent entry into force of that Treaty.

As has been acknowledged by the Conference of the Parties of the CBD, the Treaty will contribute to the implementation of the Convention, in particular, its programme of work on agricultural biodiversity.

This is, in fact, recognized in the text of the Treaty itself, which stipulates that the Treaty's objectives are to be reached in harmony with the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The role of the Treaty in facilitating access to plant genetic resources is also recognized in the Bonn Guidelines on Access and Benefit-sharing adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2002. These guidelines are expected to assist countries and other stakeholders in developing overall strategies for access to genetic resources and the equitable

sharing of benefits arising from their utilization, and in identifying the steps involved in the process.

At its most recent meeting, held in Kuala Lumpur in February this year, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention established a process to elaborate and negotiate an international regime on access to genetic resources and benefit-sharing, in line with the call of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. In making that decision, the Conference of the Parties recognized the important contribution of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture to the process.

The question of access to genetic resources and the sharing of benefits arising from their use were among the issues foremost in people's minds when this Commission was originally established and the International Undertaking adopted in 1983. It was also a key issue during the negotiations for the Convention. It is therefore heartening to see that the international community has made substantial progress on this area as exemplified by the entry into force of the Treaty as well as the adoption of the Bonn Guidelines under the Convention on Biological Diversity and the commitment to develop an international regime on access to genetic resources and benefit-sharing within the framework of the Convention.

At the same time, I am sure that we are all cognizant of the major tasks ahead both in operationalizing current agreements and in developing the new international regime. I would therefore wish you well in preparing for the first meeting of the Treaty's Governing Body. I also look forward to the rapid operationalization of the Treaty so that the experience of its implementation can, in turn, benefit the process of elaborating the new international regime.

*Mr Chairman,*

Although much attention has been focused on access and benefit-sharing in recent years, both in this Commission and in the CBD process, our cooperation has extended into much broader areas for conserving biological diversity essential for food security. Biodiversity provides the animal, plant and microbial resources for food production and agricultural productivity. Hence, the reduction of biodiversity jeopardizes world food security. It was therefore no coincidence that the theme for this year's International Day for Biological Diversity was "Biodiversity: Food, Water and Health for All" and that of World Food Day was "Biodiversity for Food Security".

FAO played a substantial role in developing the CBD programme of work on agricultural biodiversity. This programme of work acknowledges the important role of existing instruments developed through this Commission and reinforces the need for their implementation.

But the programme of work also breaks new ground in highlighting the critical role of “associated biodiversity” in agricultural ecosystems for agricultural production. These include three aspects of biodiversity that are particularly crucial to farmers: the natural enemies of agricultural pests, pollinators, and soil biodiversity.

Concerning the first of these – FAO, through its pioneering use of farmer-field schools in integrated pest management, has clearly demonstrated in tens of thousands of farming communities throughout the world that biodiversity can help farmers produce more food, more profitably and with reduced use of chemical pesticides.

Concerning the other two – I am very pleased to see that FAO is playing the lead role in developing two cross-cutting initiatives under the Convention’s programme of work on agricultural biodiversity:

- The International Pollinators Initiative; and
- The International Soil Biodiversity Initiative.

Cooperation with FAO continues to expand. At the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties, I was asked to prepare, with FAO and other partners, options for a third cross-cutting initiative -- on biodiversity for food and nutrition -- to contribute the target of the Millennium Development Goals to halve the incidence of hunger by 2015. The initiative is meant to fully integrate biodiversity concerns into existing initiatives on food and nutrition. The main thrust of the initiative is to raise awareness among policy makers and the general public concerning the crucial role of biodiversity in strategies to promote food security, good health and nutrition, for example:

- The role of biodiversity in underpinning dietary diversity and its contribution to health;
- The importance of access to a diversity of wild and cultivated food sources by rural populations for nutrition and food security.

Indeed the true importance of biodiversity can sometimes be overlooked. We know for example, that we – as a world population -- get more than half of our energy from just three crops: rice, maize and wheat.

But that doesn’t change the fact that millions of people are dependent on other staple crops like fonio, amaranth and teff.

Nor does it change the fact that we all require a range of food sources, including fruits and vegetables, to obtain the balance of nutrients we need for a healthy diet, and to benefit from other functional properties of foods such as antibiotic, antioxidant, anti-glycemic and other pharmacological properties. Indeed various epidemiological studies uphold the conventional wisdom of a varied diet.

While recognition of the importance of biodiversity for food, nutrition and health is not new, it can add important insights to the contemporary challenges of addressing both under-nutrition and obesity, sometimes even in the same populations.

*Mr Chairman,*

The last 20 years have seen increasing recognition of the importance of biodiversity and its components in providing the very basis of sustainable development, and in supporting sustainable agriculture in particular. At the same time, the period has witnessed continuing loss of biodiversity at all levels. Of all the global changes that we are faced with, biodiversity loss is arguably both the most dramatic and the least appreciated.

At its sixth meeting, in 2002, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, having now a virtually universal membership, set an ambitious target, namely, to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on earth.

This target is the central mission of the Convention's Strategic Plan, which focuses on promoting implementation of the Convention.

At its last meeting, the Conference of the Parties emphasized the important linkages between the 2010 target and the fight against hunger, as well as the other Millennium Development Goals.

Much, however, remains to be done. Full implementation of the Convention is still constrained by a certain lack of appreciation of the value and importance of maintaining biodiversity at all levels—genetic, species and ecosystem. Public awareness needs to be enhanced. The urgency of the biodiversity loss and its consequences need to be more widely understood. More funding needs to be mobilized to advance implementation. Most importantly, biodiversity considerations need to feature more prominently in decision-making in all sectors of the economy.

In this respect, no sectors are more important than agriculture, forestry and fisheries. FAO, and this Commission have a key role to play in ensuring that the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity are fully integrated into these sectors.

The Conference of the Parties has called for enhanced cooperation among organizations and asked me to explore options for a global partnership aimed at achieving the 2010 target. I invite FAO and this Commission to commit to contributing to the 2010 target, to meet the objectives of the CBD and also as an

essential contribution to the MDGs and the target to reduce hunger by half set by the World Food Conference here in Rome in 1996.

I wish you success in your meetings over the coming two weeks.

Thank you for your attention.