

**ADDRESS DELIVERED**

**BY MR JACQUES CHIRAC  
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**TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
"BIODIVERSITY: SCIENCE AND GOVERNANCE"**

**UNESCO – PARIS**

**24 JANUARY 2005**

President of the Republic of Madagascar,  
Prime Minister of Malaysia,  
Prime Minister of Guinea-Bissau,  
Director-General of UNESCO,  
Madam Minister and Winner of the Nobel Peace Prize  
Professor WILSON,  
Director-General of the United Nations Environment Programme,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Distinguished friends,

On all continents and in all the oceans, the warning beacons are lighting up. We can no longer ignore proof of the frequently irremediable erosion of the living environment. The destruction of the primary tropical forests, which are probably home to more than half of all terrestrial species. The shrinking of the natural habitat due to population growth and urbanisation. The slow destruction of the coral reefs, almost one-third of which has either disappeared or suffered serious damage. The sharp decline in the numbers of the great wild mammals. If we fail to act, these emblematic animals will soon exist only in captivity, reduced to the state of living fossils.

Thanks in particular to the remarkable work of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, it has now been established that almost sixteen thousand known species are in serious danger of extinction. The destruction of this heritage, built up over many thousands of years of evolution, is a terrible loss and a grave threat to our future.

Due to the staggering progress of science and industry over the past two centuries, the short timescale of our societies has come into collision with the long timescale of biological diversity, the product of millions of years of evolution. Species have always disappeared as a result of the effect of natural

renewal of ecosystems. But they are now disappearing, it would seem, at a rate of up to one thousand times faster. So much so that some scientists fear that modern societies may be in the process of bringing about the sixth great wave of extinction of species since life first appeared on Earth.

After establishing its mastery over the whole planet, mankind is today rediscovering the fact that its fate is irrevocably bound up with that of all other living species. It is slowly – all too slowly -- becoming aware that far from liberating man from the bonds of nature, the power humankind has acquired, carries with it unprecedented responsibility. A responsibility that affects the fate of each and every one of us.

Our generations are undoubtedly the last still to have the ability to stop this destruction of the living environment, and to do so before we cross the threshold of no return, beyond which the very future of mankind on earth might well be jeopardized.

Together with Professor Henri de Lumley, it is time for us to recognise that "Humanity as a whole must formulate a new planetary ethic capable of managing the future of mankind while also remembering its origins, its slow and laborious ascent and its vital links with the natural environment, which we must preserve".

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We know enough about the decline in biodiversity to start taking steps to reverse it. But we are still not aware of all its potential consequences and repercussions for the human species. We know very little about the impact of climate change on biodiversity.

To date, barely one million eight hundred thousand species have been identified out of a total estimated at between five and 30 million, a margin of uncertainty that reflects the extent of our ignorance.

Scientists are just beginning to unravel the extraordinary complexity of relations between the different species and between species and their environment. This interdependence is the key to the fragile equilibrium of each ecosystem and to the entire biosphere. Man cannot see himself as separate from it. This is the reality expressed by the very idea of biodiversity, a word popularised by Professor WILSON, to whom I would like to pay a special tribute today.

This complexity, which is still poorly understood, is one reason why it has taken so long for mankind to become aware of the problem, despite the growing body of evidence bearing witness to extinction and destruction.

Therefore, together with immediate action which needs to be taken, we must also deepen our knowledge of biodiversity and establish premises recognised by all scientists, so that the international community can shoulder its responsibilities. This means mobilising all the scientific disciplines concerned and evidently requires a vast programme of international cooperation.

Since 1988, the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has brought about a scientific consensus on the reality and significance of global warming, which many experts initially refused to admit.

We need a similar type of mechanism for biodiversity. I hope that this conference will prove to be a decisive step in this direction. I hereby call on all scientists to join forces in order to set up a world-wide network of experts; and France will suggest to its partners in the Convention on Biological Diversity the creation of an intergovernmental group on changes to biodiversity.

We are already planning to reinforce our own research resources and will ask our European partners to join us in launching a vast scientific programme on the biodiversity of European overseas regions and territories, which harbour some of the richest ecosystems on the planet.

This international effort will contribute to the much-needed world governance of the environment. As would the creation of a United Nations Organisation for the Environment, which France has called for, along with many other countries.

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Preservation of biodiversity, like the struggle against climate change, requires radical changes in attitudes and lifestyles.

Awareness is increasing in both North and South. The Nobel Prize Committee's decision in 2004 to recognise Madam Wangari MAATHAI – to whom I address my warmest congratulations – is a testimonial to this growing awareness.

But if we are to respond to the urgency of the situation, we must step up the pace of action. The issue here is the ability of our societies to gauge the ecological consequences of our actions and individual or collective choices, and to measure our responsibility vis à vis future generations.

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The industrialised countries have built part of their development on unlimited use of natural resources. We must now use our capacity for scientific research and industrial innovation to go beyond the seeming contradiction between protection of the environment and economic growth.

By enshrining a Charter for the Environment in its constitution this year, France has publicly declared its commitment to this cause. The Charter establishes biodiversity as a right and as a collective heritage. It defines the principle of precaution. It is vital to apply it to the questions raised by the deterioration of the living environment. Our imperfect knowledge of biodiversity cannot serve as an excuse to justify lack of action.

This change in attitudes and actions with respect to the environment and biological diversity is a matter of concern to each and every one of us. We will succeed by educating the new generations. As of this year, environmental studies are on the curriculum of all French schools. We will succeed by ensuring that information is disseminated to the wider public. I have asked the Government to launch this year a vast campaign to increase public awareness, in conjunction with non-profit associations, whose crucial contribution to vigilance and advance warning are known to all of us. We will succeed also by encouraging an increasing number of companies to act in an exemplary manner. I am thinking, for example, of actions such as sponsoring a species or an endangered natural environment.

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In the countries of the South, preservation of the environment may come into conflict with the crucial requirements of survival, population pressure and development needs, leading, in many cases, to the sacrifice of a priceless natural heritage.

This heritage is valuable first and foremost in ecological terms. But it also has an economic value that is often neglected. If intelligently mobilized, it can serve the cause of development, as can be seen from the achievements and projects described by the President of the Republic of Madagascar and the Prime Minister of Malaysia.

Biodiversity is an extraordinary reservoir of active principles and genes for industrial research, in particular for the chemical and pharmaceutical industries.

However, the international rules presently governing intellectual property are not adapted to the situation. If protection and development of biodiversity are to make a proper contribution to growth, we must seek a new distribution of its benefits. The discussions initiated on this complex question have become bogged down. To give them new impetus and explore new avenues, I hereby invite the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity to organise a high-level seminar on this question in Paris. And without awaiting the findings of this seminar, I invite companies and organisations working directly with living resources to act to ensure that the benefits are fairly distributed.

I also believe that the biodiversity potential of farming produce in many countries of the South could be better tapped. I am thinking here of possible mechanisms such as the guaranteed labels based on the concept of local origin. I hope that negotiations initiated on this point at the WTO will indeed lead to concrete results in the Doha round.

Finally, biodiversity is an obvious asset for tourism. We must help countries keen to promote biodiversity to implement this approach in a spirit of sustainable development.

More generally, in 2005, the year of development, France hopes to see the espousing of a broader concept of solidarity. Biodiversity and climate equilibrium are international public goods. We must therefore be willing to bear and share part of the cost of preserving them. This could be one of the innovative development funding solutions proposed by France.

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Since the Convention on biological diversity came into force, a considerable body of standardisation work has been accomplished. However, legitimate questions have been raised as to the effectiveness of decisions taken by the international community since 1993. Biodiversity continues to recede. The objective of arresting this decline by 2010, adopted in 2002 at the International Conference at The Hague, now looks to be unattainable unless we truly implement the necessary measures.

I propose appointing a committee of independent wise men to examine the mechanisms of the Convention and ways and means of improving them.

Every country must take concrete steps, particularly those that harbour exceptional biodiversity. Like France, which is wholly committed to this principle.

Given the urgency of the question, we must first of all focus on protection of threatened species and sustainable management of endangered natural environments.

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Growth in international trade is accompanied by the worrying development of organised trafficking in animals and plants. We must strengthen international cooperation to combat this illegal trade, within the framework of the CITES Convention. Since 2002, France has tightened customs controls and set up a centralized unit to combat actions endangering the environment.

Likewise, we must increase our efforts to combat illegal trade in protected tropical woods. France is prepared to play its part by tightening controls and penalties.



We are also working with our African partners to help them develop a system of eco-certification for wood harvested from sustainably managed forests. In Brazzaville in a few days time, I will be presenting France's specific contribution to the great project to preserve forests in the Congo basin.

As of this year, the Government will use only eco-certified wood in its large real-estate construction projects. By 2010, this principle will be extended to cover all government procurement.

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Protecting and saving endangered species requires setting up specific programmes in each of the countries concerned. It also requires preservation of their environment. We must therefore continue to designate protected areas across the planet, governed by the rules of conservation, imposing greater or lesser restrictions on human activities, depending on the stakes involved.

In areas not covered by government jurisdiction, the international community must define the rules. For instance, to safeguard parts of the deep marine environment that are particularly rich in biodiversity, France will advocate the creation of a network of protected areas in international waters, in light of existing protection mechanisms. I hope that the relevant regional fishing organisations will resolutely follow suit.

To further reinforce protection of its natural heritage, and in keeping with its commitments under the Convention on biological diversity, France recently designed a national biodiversity strategy. This should provide strong impetus for all our policies aimed at nature protection and conservation.

Better coordination between the different agencies responsible for monitoring the natural environment will create a veritable police force whose aim is to protect nature.

France will give new impetus to the creation of national parks. By 2006 at the latest, and with the full agreement of local authorities, I hope that the Reunion island and French Guyana national parks will be up and running. Illegal gold washing will be eradicated from the latter park. Gold mining will be strictly controlled and restricted to very limited peripheral areas. The Amerindian and Guyana Maroon populations will benefit from preservation of their traditional activities. This reform will also make it possible to create new natural marine parks, in the Iroise sea, for instance.

France will create natural reserves in the French Southern hemisphere and Antarctic regions, in Mayotte and Reunion Island. With the support of New Caledonian representatives, it will also strengthen the protection and management of the coral barrier reef with a view to having it declared a UNESCO World Heritage site.

France will complete its network of Natura 2000 sites by the end of 2006. It has taken care to work in consultation with local players, which is the only serious guarantee of long-term viability for these sites. Here, good management is as important as designation of sites, and we have made progress in this respect in the last two years.

In the same spirit of rigour and consultation, France will pursue its policy of conservation of the Pyrenean brown bear.

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The decline of biodiversity does not affect only the more conspicuous species. It is also visible in the whole of the natural world. Each and every one of us can observe the decline in once common insect or bird populations. French agriculture has begun to implement practices which are more in harmony with the environment. Greater encouragement of biological agriculture will no doubt contribute to this, but these practices should also be adopted by French

agriculture as a whole. Likewise, conservation measures have been initiated to prevent the disappearance of plant species and animal breeds.

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Thanks to all these measures, France should be able to meet the European commitment to halting the erosion of its biodiversity by 2010. The French Institute for the Environment and the French Natural History Museum will work together within the framework of an observatory to monitor compliance with the 2010 target.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, through mankind's growing awareness that we are a part of the biosphere and dependent on the living world as a whole, our civilisation has recognised its fragility.

The time has come for us to tread the path of a humanist ecology. To integrate, in our quest for economic and human progress, an awareness of our duties to nature and our responsibilities to future generations.

We will succeed thanks to the action of each and every one of us.

Under the aegis of UNESCO, your conference on "science and governance of biodiversity" should help speed up the process of awareness and recognition of the urgency of the task ahead. It should open up for the international community as a whole new horizons of responsibility and solidarity.

Thank you for your attention.