



Please Check Against Delivery

STATEMENT BY

**HAMDALLAH ZEDAN
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**

CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

TO

**THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
BIODIVERSITY SCIENCE AND GOVERNANCE**

Paris, France, 24 – 28 January 2005

Excellencies

Distinguished participants

I am greatly honoured to have the opportunity to address such a global gathering of eminent leaders and personalities, renowned scientists, policy makers, representatives of international organizations, the business community and civil society. Your presence here is a clear testimony to the importance and commitment you attach to the subject-matter to be addressed.

I would also like to express my deep appreciation to President Chirac for his personal commitment to the ongoing global efforts to reduce the current rate of biodiversity loss and to the Government of the French Republic for their efforts, generosity and hospitality in hosting this conference.

It is gratifying to see the increased recognition given to the value of biodiversity and its essential role in promoting sustainable development and poverty alleviation. The rich variety of biological resources and the interactions between them are not a luxury; they are vital for the development and growth of human societies and for the very existence of life on Earth. Biological diversity forms the basis for our food supply, it is the source of medicines on which health care depends, it provides raw materials for industry, and it provides a vital range of services, from air purification to water filtration, from climate stabilization to flood control.

This importance of biodiversity for the survival of humans and their livelihoods was vividly demonstrated in the aftermath of the recent Asian tsunami. This terrible tragedy caused widespread devastation and loss of human lives, which will have long-term consequences for many communities in the area. Once the immediate humanitarian needs are accommodated, it is time to rehabilitate impacted ecosystems and to look at lessons learned. Early reports indicate that areas with healthier ecosystems, such as dense, intact mangrove forests and coral reefs, have been less affected than areas that have been disturbed or degraded. The maintenance of ecosystem health and resilience is therefore a central response strategy for restoring livelihoods, and a means towards minimizing the impact of future disasters.

The timing of this Conference and the issues to be discussed are particularly significant for the Convention on Biological Diversity. The Convention has been recognized as the key instrument for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. It seeks to stop the unprecedented loss of the natural resource base on which life on Earth depends. It seeks to do so by integrating conservation and economic development and by ensuring that the benefits of biodiversity continue to flow and are shared equitably.

This conference comes at a time when the Convention has just marked the 11th anniversary of its entry into force. Since its adoption, the Convention has evolved from a set of broad goals, objectives and guiding principles to the current focus on more practical implementation and tighter links to its role in promoting sustainable development and poverty alleviation.

There is much to be proud of in the work of the Convention process over the years. As a result of the commitment of various actors, biodiversity is no longer a marginal issue. There has been a wider acceptance that biodiversity and ecosystem services are central to efforts aimed at achieving the Millennium Development Goals. At the national level, national biodiversity strategies and action plans have been developed in over 100 countries. Internationally, there has been an increased level of support for the Convention and greater participation and involvement of civil society and indigenous groups.

But there is no room for complacency. We still face formidable challenges and obstacles. While the loss of individual species catches our attention, it is the fragmentation, degradation and outright loss of forests, wetlands, coral reefs, and other ecosystems that poses the gravest threat to biodiversity. To put this in perspective, we now know that about 45% of the Earth's original forests have been cleared and the remaining total forests are still shrinking rapidly particularly in the tropics. We also know that up to 10% of coral reefs, among the richest of ecosystems, have been destroyed and one third of the remainder face collapse in the next 10 to 20 years. Global atmospheric changes, such as ozone depletion and climate change are adding to this stress. There

is mounting evidence of the impacts of global warming on habitats and the distribution of species.

Here is where this present conference has the potential to play an important role. We still have a limited understanding of the overall status of biodiversity – the rates of loss, extinction trends, causes of decline - and are unable to monitor the status and trends of the many aspects of biodiversity. There is a lot that we don't know and the international community has yet to come to grips with this impediment. The IUCN 2004 Global Species Assessment reveals that 12% of all bird species, 23% of all mammal species, 32% of all amphibians and 34 % of all gymnosperms are threatened with extinction. And these are figures about some of the most well known taxonomic groups. The situation in other groups may be equally severe or even worse. Little is known about non-terrestrial systems such as freshwater and marine, or many species-rich habitats for example tropical forests or the ocean depths, or indeed the species-rich groups such as invertebrates, plants and fungi which together make up the overwhelming majority of species.

The WWF 2004 Living Planet Report also paints a grim picture of the overall trends in populations of wild species around the world. The conclusion of the report is that we no longer live within the sustainable limits of the planet. Ecosystems are suffering, the global climate is changing, and the further we continue down this path of unsustainable consumption and exploitation, the more difficult it will become to protect and restore the biodiversity that remains.

There are, however, some rays of hope. The international community has recognized the magnitude of the looming biodiversity crisis and set a global target of achieving by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national. The responsibility to address and achieve this target is perhaps the most fundamental challenge facing the Convention and its partners to date. It is a responsibility that demands that we take decisive actions and achieve tangible results to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the fair and equitable sharing of its benefits.

Mr. Chairman,

The efforts required to achieve the 2010 target are fraught with enormous difficulties. The target can catalyse effective conservation only if systems are in place to inform governments, industry and individuals about the consequences of their actions. This requires simplifying the available data, establishing meaningful indicators that are widely understood and can be regularly measured. It also requires the timely presentation of our knowledge in ways that are useful to decision makers. For this to be done, the available knowledge and data from fields such as biology, sociology, anthropology, economics and law must be gathered and analysed in a systematic and comprehensive manner. Yet, we are still grappling with the complex nature of biodiversity and we have so far identified only a fraction of the Earth's biological resources. One of the key obstacles to be overcome is the complexity of the science of biodiversity and in particular, the quality of our knowledge. While we do not expect the conference to resolve the complexities of this challenge, we look to you all to explore practical ways in which we can use what we have and what we know to channel our assets to support a harmonized approach to meeting the 2010 target.

Within the Convention process, the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties provided clear guidance on actions required to use available data and indicators to assess progress towards the 2010 target. The Conference of the Parties adopted a framework within which national targets could be set and indicators identified. It also identified seven focal areas to achieve the target and agreed on a set of trial indicators for assessing progress. These seven areas are:

- Reducing the rate of loss of the components of biodiversity
- Promoting sustainable use of biodiversity
- Addressing the major threats to biodiversity
- Maintain ecosystem integrity and the provision of goods and services
- Protecting traditional knowledge, innovations and practices
- Ensuring the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the use of genetic resources, and

- Mobilizing financial and technical resources

I am pleased to report that the ongoing work in this area has drawn on the expertise and resources of many partner organizations and individual experts and the expected outcome will no doubt serve to support the assessment of progress towards the 2010 target. Regional targets and indicators related to the 2010 biodiversity target have been adopted in the Kyiv Biodiversity Resolution of the pan-European process as well as the Gothenburg Target of the European Union. There are other examples where similar efforts are under way. Let me hasten to point out, however, that, on their own, these efforts are not enough. A lot more needs to be done and the discussions of this conference may therefore wish to reflect and explore how best to go beyond these existing efforts.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me now turn to another area of global concern: currently, about 1.2 billion people subsist on \$1 a day or less and close to 3 billion people live on \$2 a day or less. There is a direct relationship between poverty and the loss of biodiversity. In many areas of the world, poverty is becoming endemic as ecosystems unravel and water resources and soils become increasingly overused and degraded. Those of you who attended the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties in Kuala Lumpur, will recall that a decision was taken to explore opportunities to establish the 2010 target as an interim milestone in achieving Millennium Development Goal 7 of ensuring environmental sustainability by the year 2015; there also was a commitment to find ways to use the 2010 target and indicators to help achieve target 9 of Millennium Development Goal 7 as well as other goals related to poverty, hunger and health. Let me urge you all to translate this commitment into organizing principles to guide countries and organizations to achieve these targets.

Mr. Chairman,

In this respect, I would recall that the Convention serves as a global forum where policies are developed internationally and means of implementation agreed upon. In view of the achievements to date, I am confident that the Convention process will continue to provide an

effective forum for international consensus-building on key sustainability issues and the development of strong partnerships.

More importantly, however, the Convention process has provided the impetus for action at the regional and national levels. It has developed guidelines for the sustainable use of biological diversity consisting of practical principles, operational guidelines and implementation tools that balance the need to maximize human livelihoods against the necessity of conserving the underlying natural resource base.

Nevertheless, it is more than obvious that the global objectives of biodiversity conservation cannot be achieved without international cooperation. The 2010 target and its implementation framework provide us all with unique opportunities to marshal the efforts of the many conservation organizations with unique experience and skills, human resources and data.

One of the most critical challenges that we continue to face concerns the lack of effective communication of the various aspects of biodiversity and the key messages emerging from the process of implementing the Convention. Biodiversity as a concept remains a problem in communication. We need a coherent strategy to effectively communicate the impacts of biodiversity loss and actions being taken to curb that loss.

Addressing the challenges ahead will require immediate to long-term fundamental changes in the way resources are used and benefits are distributed. It will require changes in outlook and a reassessment of existing priorities. Most of all, it will require that Governments take account of the importance of biodiversity in developing national policies and that local populations are actively involved in the management of the resources upon which they depend.

The tasks ahead of us are enormous. But I do believe that the expertise and commitment in the assembly of participants in this conference will rise to the challenge during the discussions on the many items before us.

I wish you every success and thank you for your attention.

