CBD

Secretariat of the
Convention on Biological Diversity

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International Day for Biological Diversity

Biodiversity and Climate Change

MESSAGE
From the Executive Secretary, Ahmed Djoghlaf
On the Occasion of World Day to Combat Desertification, 17 June 2007

For information only

Dry and sub-humid lands represent a unique repository of biodiversity, culture and traditional knowledge. Home to two billion people, many of whom rely on biodiversity resources for their daily lives, dry and sub-humid lands contain extraordinarily high levels of endemism and are the origin of many of the world's food crops, livestock and varietal diversity.

Climate change, however, threatens species of dry and sub-humid lands that are already near their heat-tolerance limits. Changes in rainfall patterns will also impact on biodiversity, changing the ranges of species and composition of communities and increasing pressures from desertification, drought and wildfires.

In the Cape Floral Region in southern Africa, for example, a doubling in the atmospheric concentrations of CO_2 compared to pre-industrial levels is expected to produce warmer and drier conditions. A recent report from the World Heritage Convention revealed that as a result of these changes four protected areas in South Africa are predicted to lose between 10% and 40% of their plant species by 2050.

It is in light of such predicted and observed impacts that the International Day for Biological Diversity was celebrated on 22 May 2007 under the theme, "Biodiversity and Climate Change".

With an estimated 70% of the population of sub-Saharan Africa depending directly on dry and sub-humid lands for their daily livelihoods, the impacts of climate change could also reduce economic growth, alter regional food security and exacerbate the threats from desertification.

The recent fourth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change confirmed that the African Sahel is already subject to a shorter growing season, while by 2050 water availability in dry areas at mid-latitudes is expected to decrease by as much as 30%.

Climate change is also expected to increase water stress in the Mediterranean Basin, an area which is currently home to more than 11,700 known endemic species. This will only add to the challenges of maintaining ecosystem services in a region where an estimated 50% of agricultural soils are threatened by desertification.

The maintenance and restoration of dry and sub-humid lands through combating desertification is a key option for adaptation to climate change. Combating desertification can also benefit biodiversity including soil and plant biomass that can contribute to climate change mitigation.

One billion people are already threatened by desertification and, as our drylands become warmer and drier, this number may grow even higher. As climate change increases obstacles to the protection of dry and sub-humid lands, synergies between our Conventions at all levels become even more important. Biologically diverse and healthy ecosystems are not only threatened by climate change and desertification, but are also important for tackling them. So I would like stress that now more than ever, collaboration between the three Rio Conventions is essential to

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effectively address the loss of biodiversity, desertification and climate change, and I pledge the commitment of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity to spare no efforts in enhancing relationships with our sister Conventions.

I am pleased, therefore, to join you in the celebrations of the World Day to Combat Desertification on 17 June, 2007 under the theme “Desertification and Climate Change – One Global Challenge”. I wish you every success with the day’s events.