



# Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

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International Day for Biological Diversity



Biodiversity and Climate Change

**Statement by Dr. Ahmed Djoghlaif  
Executive Secretary  
Convention on Biological Diversity**

**to the**

**Fifth Meeting of the  
Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on  
Access and Benefit-sharing**

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United Nations  
Environment Programme

413 Saint-Jacques Street, Suite 800  
Montreal, QC H2Y 1N9, Canada

Tel.: +1 514 288 2220  
Fax : +1 514 288 6588

[www.cbd.int](http://www.cbd.int)  
[secretariat@cbd.int](mailto:secretariat@cbd.int)

Mr. Co-Chairs,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Today Canadians are celebrating Thanksgiving Day! On this very special day, which is celebrated the second Monday of October every year, Canadians give thanks for a successful harvest: the gift of nature. This tradition goes back thousands of years. Indeed, long before the first European settlers came to the continent, it was traditional in many Native American cultures to offer an official giving of thanks during autumnal gatherings. In Haudenasaunee culture—the name the Iroquois call themselves—a prayer is recited to honour “the three sisters”—beans, corn and squash—during the fall harvest.

It is fitting the opening of the fifth meeting of the Working Group on Access and Benefit-sharing coincides with this special event. It reminds us of the benefits that nature’s biological diversity so generously bestows upon us year after year. In return, it is our duty to ensure that not only we do not undervalue nature’s capital, but that we cherish and preserve its diversity, and that its benefits are shared fairly and equitably among us all. However, this capital is under serious threat.

A few days ago, on 24 September, and for the first time in the history of the United Nations General Assembly, 70 Heads of State and Government attended a Summit exclusively devoted to addressing the challenges of climate change. In his opening address, the Secretary-General, Mr Ban Ki-Moon stated that “The unprecedented challenge of climate change demands unprecedented leadership. Leadership that is ready to set new directions. Your leadership.” On the same occasion, Srgjan Kerim, the President of the UN General Assembly stated that “We all agree that climate change is unquestionably the biggest challenge facing humanity in the 21st century. There is no more time to waste. The momentum we have now must not be lost.”

While the United Nations General Assembly was convening, also for the first time, in July this year a two-day high level dialogue on climate change, the former Vice President of the United States of America, Mr. Albert Arnold “Al” Gore, wrote in an open letter published by the *New York Times* and I quote:

“Our home—Earth—is in danger. What is at risk of being destroyed is not the planet itself, but the conditions that have made it hospitable for human beings... The climate crisis offers us the chance to experience what few generations in history have had the privilege of experiencing: a generational mission; a compelling moral purpose; a shared cause; and the thrill of being forced by circumstances to put aside the pettiness and conflict of politics and to embrace a genuine moral and spiritual challenge.”

The biodiversity crisis offers also the chance and privilege of experiencing the same generational mission. It offers an opportunity to embrace a genuine, morale, spiritual, economic and cultural cause for protecting life on earth. It calls for a global alliance for protecting life on earth based on shared value, common purpose and benefit sharing.

In Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the 101 Heads of State and Government who took part at the first Earth Summit witnessed the opening for signature of the Convention on

Biological Diversity. Fifteen years later, the third objective of the Convention on access and benefit-sharing has yet to be operationalized. In September 2002, at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, 110 Heads of State and Government called for action to negotiate an international regime. Five years later, as we embark for the fifth meeting of your Working Group, which has been specially mandated to negotiate such a regime, little progress has been accomplished and the international regime has yet to take shape.

In Curitiba, at its eighth meeting, the Conference of the Parties, based on the outstanding progress achieved in Granada urged you to complete the negotiation of the international regime as soon as possible but no later than 2010: that is less than two and a half years from now! To fulfil the Curitiba mandate, you have before you less than ten working days before the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties to be held in Bonn in May 2008 and most likely another ten working days before the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. The clock is ticking and time is the essence. I would like therefore to pay tribute to your Co-Chairs Mr Fernando Casas and Mr Tim Hodges for the tireless efforts deployed since Curitiba to prepare your meeting. I would like also to pay tribute to Germany and Spain for providing financial support to allow Mr. Casas to join Mr. Hodges in the extensive inter-sessional consultation process initiated as part of their agreed road map to achieve what we in the Secretariat like to name the Nagoya International Regime on Access and Benefit-sharing. I also wish to thank Canada, the European Commission, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom for providing funds to facilitate the participation of developing countries and countries with economies in transition in this meeting. I will like also express my deep gratitude to these 10 donors for increasing by 85% the voluntary contribution to facilitate the participation of eligible countries which facilitated the participation of 60 countries. This is a strong political message in support to the mandate of your committee that need to be applauded and emulated by others.

I would like also to convey to the Germany, Netherlands, the Government of Quebec as well as the African Union and Agence intergovernmental de la Francophonie, my deep gratitude for the convening this week end of the training workshop on ABS. 55 participants attending this first training organized back to back with your working group. I sincerely hope that such capacity building events will become a permanent feature of your proceedings until and after 2010.

The success of these negotiations is key to the successful implementation of the Convention, and its future is in your hands. The success or failure of these negotiations will send a message to the world. Your Working Group offers the unique chance to respond to the challenges of putting aside what divides us and embracing what unites us as human-beings for the benefit of life on Earth

The opportunities should not be missed. This international regime may lay the foundation of a new partnership between present and future providers and users of the wealth of Mother Nature. The successful conclusion of the negotiations on one of the three fundamental objectives of this Convention for life on Earth will be a powerful instrument for the promotion sustainable development and therefore contribute to the realization of shared prosperity on our planet and the security of its peoples.

It should also be borne in mind that our knowledge of the biological diversity is still in its infancy and that facilitated access to genetic resources, as envisaged by the Convention, is essential to increasing such knowledge. According to the 2005 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, taxonomists have described and named some 1.78 million species of animals, plants and microorganisms. The full number of species on Earth is unknown, but probably lies somewhere between 5 and 30 million. This illustrates our very limited knowledge of the wealth and potential that nature has in store for us. Access to biological resources is, therefore, essential advance taxonomy.

In order to ensure that access to genetic resources is in line with the third objective of the Convention and serves to promote the fair and equitable sharing of benefits, clear procedures need to be established for access and for benefit-sharing. Access and benefit sharing must be seen as the two sides of the same coin.

Benefit-sharing should of course involve the sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources, whether in the purely scientific or commercial field. In the majority of cases where genetic resources are not used for commercial purposes, provider countries should also benefit from the use of their genetic resources. Training of scientists, sharing of research results, technology transfer, joint partnerships are some of the many mechanisms to share benefits, which can contribute to long-term development. These benefits contribute to enhancing capacity in provider countries and pave the way to a future in which all countries can fully exploit the potential benefits of their own biodiversity, in collaboration with others, and for the benefit of all. In the end, all provider countries should have the means to become users of the potential of their genetic resources.

The recent agreement reached between the world's top producer of industrial enzymes, Novozymes, and the Kenya Wildlife Service demonstrates that access and benefit-sharing can be achieved for the mutual benefit and the providers and users of genetic resources. Under this agreement, KWS permits Novozymes to make commercial use of Kenya's microbial diversity in return for royalties and a transfer of technology. This agreement demonstrates that a clear, simple, transparent and flexible international regime must be developed promptly, which will meet the needs and concerns of all involved in access to genetic resources and their use.

Such a regime is essential for achieving the enhanced phase of implementation of the Convention. Indeed the international regime on access and benefit-sharing has the potential to become a powerful tool for promoting a global partnership for Life and Earth, translating into reality the concept of sustainable development and achieving the Millennium Development Goals, including the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger. As the former Secretary General, Kofi Annan, said, "The concept of a global partnership between rich and poor countries—the eighth MDG—needs to become a reality ...Let history not say about our age that we were those who were rich in means but poor in will".

I urge you to rise to the challenge of this historical responsibility. Let this meeting prove that our age is not only rich in means, but also rich in will... An international regime on access and benefit-sharing could form the foundation of a fair and equitable partnership between today's and future providers and users of nature's cornucopia.

As the great German poet **Johann Wolfgang von Goethe** said: “Nature knows no pause in progress and development, and attaches her curse on all inaction.” Let us therefore act together during this week to as to harvest the international regime on access in Nagoya in 2010. I can assure you that my colleagues and I will spare no effort to be at your service Mr. Co-Chairs, to be at the service of all parties and governments and to be at the service of all stakeholders.

I wish you success

Let us act now.