



Secretariat of the  
**Convention on Biological Diversity**



INTERNATIONAL  
DAY FOR BIOLOGICAL  
DIVERSITY  
**22 May 2008**  
**BIODIVERSITY  
AND AGRICULTURE**

**STATEMENT**

by

**AHMED DJOGHLAF**

**EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**

of the

**CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

at the opening session

of the

**SUBSIDIARY BODY ON SCIENTIFIC, TECHNICAL AND  
TECHNOLOGICAL ADVICE**

*FAO, Rome, 18 February 2008*

*Please check against delivery*



ONE NATURE • ONE WORLD • OUR FUTURE  
COP 9 MOP 4 Bonn Germany 2008



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

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

Mr. Chair, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you walked into the building, you may have noticed a remarkable mural in the foyer, designed by Mr Abderrezak Slim and presented to FAO by the Government of Tunisia. The mural depicts a very harmonious scene where traditional agricultural practices are complemented by modern ones; where biodiversity is abundant; where fisheries are vibrant; and where all of these meet the needs of not only rural communities but far-off urban ones as well. Biodiversity has shaped cultures around the world and, in turn, biodiversity has facilitated traditionally abundant agricultural biodiversity. Agricultural biodiversity both dictates communities' access to food and is defined by cultural farming practices developed over time. All of the elements in the mural are interconnected. Farming and agricultural biodiversity are the key to providing millions with food and income.

Since its establishment, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has led international efforts to defeat hunger. The mandate of FAO provides that "the ultimate objective of all the various activities of the Organization is to ensure freedom from hunger for all mankind". The success of the mandate of FAO calls therefore for the effective implementation of the three objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity. As a result, FAO has been an invaluable partner during the negotiation and, now, the implementation of the Convention. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Director-General of FAO, Dr. Jacques Diouf, for FAO's continued support of the objectives of the Convention, as evidenced by his expected decision to resume the

secondment of a full-time staff member to the Secretariat of the Convention as a liaison officer to FAO, in charge of the implementation of the programme of work on agricultural biodiversity.

I would like also to thank the Director-General and his team for welcoming us to their facilities and for supporting the preparation of this meeting. This is the first time that FAO is hosting a meeting of SBSTTA. Indeed, this is an ideal setting to review the programmes of work on forest and agricultural biodiversity. It is therefore a great pleasure to welcome you all to the thirteenth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in this magnificent city of Rome, and in the prestigious FAO building.

Addressing the FAO's 34<sup>th</sup> session held here in this same building, Dr Jacques Diouf stated that: "The centrality of agriculture in development is, of course, the message that FAO has been sending to the international community for many years. I am happy to see that the credibility of that message has now been recognized." The centrality of agriculture to development cannot be dissociated with the need to conserve and sustainably use agricultural biodiversity.

Unfortunately, biodiversity is being lost at an unprecedented rate. According to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, species are becoming extinct at a rate up to 1,000 times faster than that shown in the fossil record. Seventy-five per cent of the food crop varieties we once grew have disappeared in the last 100 years. Today, we rely on just three – wheat, rice and maize – for over two thirds of our calories. According to FAO, around 20 per cent of domestic animal breeds are at risk of extinction, with an average of one breed lost each month. This is a matter of serious concern, as human beings rely on very few species for their food. Of the 7,000 species of plants that have been domesticated over the 10,000-year history of agriculture, a mere 30 account for 90 per cent of all the food that we eat every day.

Consequently, threats to biodiversity are also potential threats to food security. During the past 50 years, humans have altered ecosystems more rapidly and extensively than in any other period in human history. As FAO has pointed out on a number of occasions, in 2050 the world will have to feed 9 billion people, which represents an increase of 50 per cent over today's global population. However, as it stands, the "ecological footprint" of humankind now extends 20 per cent beyond the biological capacity of the planet. And yet, feeding 9 billion people will require increasing food production in the coming years. The mathematics are clearly impossible if we continue with the status quo.

This unprecedented challenge is being compounded by climate change. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts that changes in rainfall and temperature will lead to a 50 per cent decrease in yields from rain-fed agriculture. This unprecedented challenge is further compounded by accelerated urbanization. Last year marked a paradigm shift. Half of humanity now lives in cities. As recalled by Dr. Diouf, by 2050, 150 new cities the size of New York will be created. Although cities occupy only 2.8 per cent of the Earth's surface, urban dwellers use 75 per cent of the planet's natural resources. Therefore, if we hope to succeed in our efforts to conserve biodiversity through mitigation of deforestation and destructive agricultural practices, we must also engage with urban communities.

Indeed, the battle for life on Earth will be won or lost in the cities. I would like therefore to welcome the representative of the city of Rome, whose rural areas are almost unequalled in any of the other large metropolises in the world. Two thirds of municipal land in Rome is strictly protected. I would like also to congratulate the City for its projects "Rome: Capital of Biodiversity", as well as for joining the Countdown 2010 project.

As his Excellency Alfonso Pecoraro Scanio, the Italian Minister of the Environment stated “Rome “Capital of Biodiversity” is a very interesting project launched by the city administration with the aim of inviting us to reflect on a new way of conceiving our mission to save biodiversity. I hope that this project will be implemented in other capitals across the world, thereby forming an ideal network of ‘capitals of biodiversity’”. This is the very objective of the cities and biodiversity initiative launched in Curitiba in March last year by 34 mayors and will be further elaborated at the pre-municipal meeting convened by Lady Mayor Dickmann of the city of Bonn just prior of the high-level segment of ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention in May this year.

Italy is truly an appropriate host for our meetings this week, as it has been leading by example in this regard: between 1990 and 2000 Italy increased its forest cover by 0.3 per cent, compared to the European average of 0.1 per cent. Not only has this country shown true commitment to protecting and expanding its forested areas, it has also worked to include all stakeholders in such initiatives, as well as working closely with its neighbouring countries. I commend Italy for its efforts and would take this opportunity to convey to Mr. Alfonso Pecoraro Scanio my deep gratitude for his continued support and for blessing this meeting by his participation.

I would like also to thank Italy for its contribution to the success of the meetings of the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on the Review of the Programme of Work on Forest Biodiversity. At the same time, I would thank France, Germany, and the European Community for their financial contributions.

Until it becomes more valuable to protect a tree than it is to cut it down, deforestation will continue. As such, it is worthwhile to consider the opportunities for Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD), as outlined under the United Nations Framework for the Convention on Climate Change. This might alter the traditional supply-and-demand paradigm by making conservation more lucrative than destruction, and helping to mitigate deforestation and climate change.

By force of habit, we deal with agriculture and forestry as two separate topics, and yet expanding agriculture is probably the single largest threat to forest biodiversity. Reconciling the need for food and bio-energy production, in particular in view of rising global demand for energy and high-intensity agricultural produce, such as meat, is a major challenge on the road to meeting the 2010 biodiversity target. There is perhaps a need for a revised approach that considers agriculture and forestry simultaneously.

Unfortunately, deforestation continues at a rate of about 13 million hectares per year. The world's natural forests are shrinking. If we average this out over the year, it would work out to about 180,000 hectares lost during our five-day SBSTTA meeting here in Rome – 82,000 hectares of which would be primary forests. In fact, the primary forest lost over the course of our meetings will amount to an area that is almost the size of the city of Rome.

The challenges are daunting, particularly considering that we have less than two years to achieve the 2010 biodiversity target to significantly reduce the 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. We need new approaches. Mr. Achim Steiner, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) outlined this in his statement at the release of the Summary of the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report in Valencia last November: “What we need is a new ethic in which every person changes lifestyle, attitude and behaviour.” And the Convention on Biological Diversity needs to be the start of a new flow.



The banner in front of the building of FAO reminds us that: “millions of people don’t have access to adequate food. Always, everyone’s everywhere, the right for food. Make it happen.” Through your deliberations this week, under the able leadership of Mr. Ashgar and the other members of the Bureau, the scientific organ of the Convention on Biological Diversity can and should make its contribution to achieve this basic human right at a time when the international community will soon celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights and will meet as family of the Bonn Biodiversity Summit.

I thank you for your kind attention.