

## THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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### MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY 22 May 2008

This Day serves as a reminder of the importance of the Earth's biodiversity, and as a wake-up call about the devastating loss we are experiencing as irreplaceable species become extinct at an unprecedented rate.

In any attempt to address this problem, agriculture should be viewed as a starting point. The crops and domesticated livestock of today are a reflection of human management. And the news is not good. About a fifth of domestic animal breeds are at risk of extinction, with an average of one lost each month. Of the 7,000 species of plants that have been domesticated over the 10,000-year history of agriculture, only 30 account for the vast majority of the food we eat every day. Relying on so few species for sustenance is a losing strategy.

Climate change is complicating the picture. Fluctuations in temperature and precipitation are wreaking havoc on crops. Experts say these factors may cost southern Africa up to 30 per cent of its maize crop by 2030. A diversity of crops and livestock is our best insurance in the face of these changes.

Livestock production is itself a major culprit in climate change, responsible for more greenhouse gas emissions than transport. Biodiversity is directly threatened by this industry; about a fifth of terrestrial animal biomass goes to livestock – land that was once habitat for wildlife, and that can provide an important buffer against the impacts of climate change.

In a world where the population is projected to jump 50 per cent by the year 2050, these trends can spell widespread hunger and malnutrition, creating conditions where poverty, disease and even conflict can metastasize.

Preserving our planet's precious biodiversity is essential to development and security. Not just livestock and crops raised in agricultural landscapes, but also the many thousands of plants and animals in forests, oceans and other ecosystems need protection to maintain the planet's basic environmental balance.

We must rally behind attempts at a solution, such as the Global Plan of Action for Animal Genetic Resources adopted last September at a meeting supported by the United Nations. Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity are meeting in May to work, with all other partners, to redouble efforts to reduce biodiversity loss as they seek to achieve the global target set for 2010.

We all have a stake in supporting functional ecosystems, diverse in species and genetic resources, to sustain life everywhere. It is too late to undo the damage the planet has suffered, but it is never too soon to start preserving all that we have left. May this International Day for Biological Diversity unite us in this mission.