



Convention on
Biological Diversity



**MESSAGE BY
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**EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE
CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

ON THE OCCASION OF

**THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF ATUTAX,
THE ASSOCIATION TUNISIENNE DE TAXONOMIE**

*Cité des Sciences de Tunis
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Tunisia has a great geographical and climatic diversity and such a diverse environment provides us with a variety of important ecosystems and landscapes. The ecosystem zones in Tunisia include forests, wetlands, littoral zones, steppes, and sub-Saharan tropical desert. In accordance with Tunisia's national report, Tunisia is host to 3,573 plant species and 2,244 animal species. There is a total of 362 bird, 63 reptile and 78 mammal species. The avifauna of Tunisia is spread throughout the territory and is considered as one of the main indicators of biological richness and ecosystem health.

Long before the time of Hannibal, and of caravan and ship trade between African regions and Europe, the interaction of humans and nature permitted the development of a wide range of cultural and historical diversity in Tunisia. This is an indispensable asset to the northern African region, and to the world. Incidentally, eight of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites were designated in Tunisia, and one of most interesting heritage sites for us, with regard to biodiversity, is the Ichkeul National Park, where the wetlands are considered the most important remaining wetlands in the western Mediterranean.

The Ichkeul National Park is known for its great cooperation with the national government, IUCN and local communities. Another important aspect is European support, both financial and academic, for projects to control the water level and salinity of the lake and to maintain and develop the pondweed, the major food source for wintering and migrating waterfowl. Both of these initiatives greatly focus on conservation. The park management further extended the project to rural engineering, fishing, grazing, agriculture, fishery and environmental planning in order to support the community's sustainable development. This is an important case study from which the local community, academia and several government departments learned. This is a great example of a national park safeguarding wetlands, including the diversity of its terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.

Fundamental steps to safeguard biodiversity include being aware that biodiversity surrounds us, understanding its function in ecosystems, and knowing the value of the goods and services that we receive from biodiversity. We can only move forward by taking steps to develop strategies on conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Today's first international conference of ATUTAX will ensure that the steps will be firmly taken in Tunisia and in the region, by strengthening the regional collaboration on taxonomy.

Taxonomy and taxonomic capacity are basic concerns for biodiversity conservation, since taxonomic capacity determines the capacity of the community to find and understand biodiversity, and thus develop sound plans and actions. The Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity recognised these important steps. To guide and ensure that each country has the capacity to identify and monitor biodiversity, the programme of work for the Global Taxonomy Initiative (GTI) was developed under the Convention. The programme of work for the GTI was designed to build national taxonomic capacity through the networks of regional and global collaboration, and to maximise the use of limited taxonomic expertise and information resources for the implementation of the CBD. With the GTI in mind, I congratulate ATUTAX, BioNET-NAFRINET, the Centre of Biotechnology of Borj Cedria Technopark (Tunisia), and the Network Coordinating Institute of BioNET-NAFRINET for establishing a strong network of taxonomists and linking taxonomy to the process of implementing the CBD in Tunisia and the northern African region in the year 2010.

The year 2010 is a special year for the community of the CBD. The United Nations declared 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity. During this year, every country, city and citizen are invited to celebrate biodiversity.

Furthermore, you may recall that at the Conference of the Parties in 2002, and later at the World Summit for Sustainable Development, world leaders made a promise to reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by the year 2010, under the “2010 Biodiversity Target”. Unfortunately, the third edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook, to be issued on 10 May 2010, will demonstrate, based on the 110 national reports received by the Secretariat to-date, that the 2010 biodiversity target will not be met. This edition of Global Biodiversity Outlook will also show the way ahead for the post-2010 biodiversity target to be adopted in October of this year in Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture, Japan, at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. This post-2010 target will also be submitted to the Heads of State and governments attending the high-level meeting of the sixty-fifth session of the United Nations General Assembly to be held in New York in September of this year. The Nagoya Summit will adopt the 2011-2020 Strategic Plan of the Convention, focused on the implementation of the CBD as well as the development of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

I hope that the first international conference of ATUTAX will further facilitate capacity development in taxonomy, in order to assist with the review of the existing national strategy and with the development of post-2010 national biodiversity strategies and action plans based on the scientifically sound biodiversity observation. I also hope that it will ensure that the status of biodiversity in northern African countries will be reported during the next decade under the new strategic plan of the CBD.

I wish you success at the conference and look forward to your report on the conference.
