



**MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY  
OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY  
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**on the occasion of  
World Environment Day  
5 June 2019**

*“Beat Air Pollution”*

Take a deep breath. Exhale. Thank nature.

This World Environment Day, we are focusing on air pollution, one of the gravest environmental threats we face today and one that affects each and every one of us. Nothing is more fundamental than our basic need for oxygen. Yet nine out of 10 people breathe polluted air, and that has devastating consequences for our health, according to the World Health Organization. Either directly or indirectly, poor air quality is responsible for one in every eight deaths worldwide, the WHO says. That is 7 million premature deaths every year, an astounding figure that we cannot simply accept.

On this World Environment Day, we all have an opportunity to reflect on the role that biodiversity and healthy ecosystems play in supplying and purifying the air we breathe. Plants naturally filter the air as well as the water we drink. Trees and other vegetation actually remove pollutants from the air by absorbing toxins into their leaves and needles and releasing fresh oxygen. In cities, trees not only absorb emissions from vehicles but also provide shade in the summer, bringing down temperatures and reducing the need for air conditioners fuelled by highly polluting types of energy.

This natural choreography is vital to our survival, but it is being overwhelmed by the amount of contaminants we are putting into the air. Just as air pollution impacts human health, it also has negative effects on plant and animal health and, ultimately, weakens entire ecosystems. Air pollution is also closely linked to climate change, since the fossil fuels that are largely responsible for global heating also have a large part in fouling the air. Addressing air pollution is critical to combatting climate change, and vice versa.

From purifying our air and water to providing us with food, shelter and much more, there are countless ways nature sustains human life and quality of life. But air pollution is making it impossible for our natural ecosystems to continue providing these benefits. In other words, by



polluting the air, we are destroying the natural infrastructure that we depend on for clean air, for fresh water, for life itself. It is a serious cycle that needs positive transformations to address the drivers of biodiversity loss and gear us on an accelerated pathway towards living in harmony with nature.

On this World Environment Day, take a deep breath. Breathe out, and make a commitment to Beat Air Pollution.