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Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

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International Day for Biological Diversity



Biodiversity and Climate Change

Statement by Ahmed Djoghlaif, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity to the Fifteenth Session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, New York, 10 May 2007

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and gentlemen,

In many parts of Europe, the spring of this year has set new records in terms of temperature and dryness. In Germany, April was the warmest, sunniest and driest since 1901. Spring was preceded by the warmest fall in Europe in 500 years and the warmest winter on record worldwide. It was also Canada's second warmest winter on record. Montreal celebrated Christmas without snow. Australia continue to suffer from its worst drought in 100 years which is expected this year to wipe off up to one percent of its one trillion dollars economy and is now seriously affecting Murray Darling River, its largest river system. An unusually dry season in Costa Rica might have been one of the factors contributing to the nation-wide power failure that lasted more than three hours in some parts of the country and caused about 10 million dollars in damage. Many major rivers, including the Colorado in the United States of America, the Yellow River in China and the Tagus, which flows through Spain and Portugal, are faced with a similar situation. Climate change has caused the level of the Lake Victoria to drop by 30 per cent. Last year, 11 million people were affected by food shortages owing to the continued drought in the Horn of Africa. As a result of climate change, sixty-five developing countries, most of them in Africa risk losing about 280 million tonnes of potential cereal production, valued at \$56 billion. Heavy rare rainfall and severe flooding affected the Sahara Desert region. Fourteen typhoons developed in South-East Asia, killing thousands of people and causing billions of dollars worth of damage. Of the 12 hottest years on record worldwide, 11 have occurred since 1995. "Warming of the climate system is unequivocal." The three reports issued this year by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) are categorical. The current concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is greater than has ever been observed in the last 650,000 years. Climate change is real and human activity is the main cause. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment concluded that the pressures on the planet's natural functions caused by human activity have reached such a high level that the ability of ecosystems to satisfy the needs of future generations is seriously, and perhaps irreversibly, compromised. Impacts on the natural functions of our planet have never been as destructive as in the last fifty years, leading to an unprecedented extinction of biological diversity on earth. The extinction of animal and plant species is now occurring at between one hundred and one thousand times higher than the natural rate. Already, 20 per cent of known bird species have disappeared. Forty-one per cent of mammals are in decline. Dramatic reductions have also been observed in amphibian populations over the last thirty years. Unless urgent action is taken, by mid-century up to one fifth of the Earth's remaining plant species may be doomed to extinction. Climate change has been identified as one of the main drivers of the unprecedented loss of biodiversity and threatens to increase extinction rates. According to IPCC, approximately 20 - 30% of plant and animal species assessed so far are likely to be at increased risk of extinction if increases in global average temperature exceed 1.5-2.5°C. The progressive acidification of oceans due to increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide is expected to have negative impacts on marine shell forming organisms (e.g., corals) and their dependent species. As these examples indicate, the relationship between climate change and



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biodiversity is unequivocal. This was recognized by the participants of the round table between IPCC experts and the Bureau and chairs of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice, (SBSTTA) held thanks to the financial support of Canada, in Montreal on 19-20 March 2007. For the first time, members and past chairs of the Bureau of SBSTTA and experts from the IPCC met to discuss commonalities and opportunities for enhanced cooperation between the two bodies. Climate change and the unprecedented loss of biodiversity are therefore the two most pressing environmental challenges facing mankind. It is for this reason that in a few days, on 22 May, the international community will celebrate the International Day for Biodiversity under the theme "biodiversity and climate change". I am extremely grateful to Mr. Yvo de Boer and his team, as well as the executive secretaries of the other biodiversity-related convention for the spirit of collaboration in celebrating this major event in the life of our respective conventions. I am also very grateful to Mr. de Boer for the collaboration between our two conventions on issues related to technology transfer, vulnerability and adaptation, and the reduction of emissions from deforestation. This spirit of collaboration has been demonstrated during the UNFCCC Workshop on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation in Developing Countries held in Cairns, Australia, on 7-9 March 2007 as well as the informal consultation on the links between the conservation and sustainable use of forest biodiversity and climate change, convened by the Secretariat in Rome on 17 March 2007 with the financial support of Canada. This spirit of collaboration also guided the convening of the Workshop on Climate Change and Wetlands held in Gland on 23 to 24 March 2007, in partnership with the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention. At its eighth meeting, held in Curitiba, Brazil, in March last year, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity highlighted the importance of integrating biodiversity considerations into all relevant national policies, programmes and plans and to rapidly develop tools for the implementation of biodiversity conservation activities which contribute to climate change adaptation. As a consequence, when it convenes at the headquarters of UNESCO from 2 to 6 July this year, the Convention's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) will consider guidance on how to integrate relevant climate-change impacts and response activities into the programmes of work of the Convention. The implementation of the programmes of work of the two conventions calls for enhanced collaboration at all levels. It is for this reason, that the ministers of the environment of the G8 with their counterparts from five mega-diverse countries agreed that "biodiversity and climate change are intertwined and more efforts are needed to coherently address biodiversity and climate change together". The "Potsdam Initiative-Biodiversity 2010" considered and supported by the G8+5 at their historic meeting held on 15-16 March 2007 is a major contribution by the host of the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to be held in Bonn, in May 2008. Accordingly, the next G8 Summit, to be held Heiligendamm, Germany, from 6 to 8 June 2007, may be the first Summit to have on its agenda the question of climate change and biodiversity.

Excellencies,

The cost of inaction on climate change has been evaluated by the Stern report at more than 5,000 billion dollars. The report has demonstrated in economic terms, that postponing the required action to address climate-change challenges is no longer an option. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment demonstrates that postponing the required action to address the unprecedented loss of biodiversity is no longer an option. As a result of the Potsdam Initiative, the international community will have very soon a financial evaluation of the cost of inaction for biodiversity. The link between climate change and biodiversity is one of survival for humankind. In Johannesburg at the World Summit of Sustainable Development, the leaders of the world committed themselves to substantially reduce the rate of loss of biodiversity by 2010. The clock is ticking, the countdown has started and the need for urgent action in order to achieve a more sustainable future has never been so pressing. There is no time for delay.

Thank you for your kind attention.