



INFORMATION NOTE

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THE IMPORTANCE OF BIODIVERSITY



Geneva, 12 January 2010 - *"The loss of biological diversity stands alongside climate change as one of the most pressing areas of global policy, and is thus one of the crucial challenges of our time."* – Dr. Norbert Röttgen, Federal Environment Minister of Germany

Biological diversity – or biodiversity – is the term given to the variety of life on Earth and the natural patterns it forms. The biodiversity we see today is the fruit of billions of years of evolution, shaped by natural processes and, increasingly, by the influence of humans. It forms the web of life of which we are an integral part and upon which we fully depend.

Seventy per cent of the world's poor live in rural areas, and biodiversity loss poses current and future dangers for them. They depend directly on biological resources for as much as 90% of such needs as food, fuel, medicine, shelter and transportation. Over 3 billion people depend on marine and coastal biodiversity, while more than 1.6 billion rely for their livelihoods on forests and non-timber forest products. In addition, the degradation of habitat and the loss of biodiversity pose a threat to more than 1 billion people living in dry and sub-humid lands, particularly in Africa, the continent most affected by drought and desertification.

According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) publication *Global Environment Outlook 3*, the global market value of pharmaceuticals derived from genetic resources is estimated at US\$75 billion to \$150 billion annually. In addition, some 75% of the world's population relies for health care on traditional medicines, which are derived directly from natural sources.

Rich diversity is being lost at a greatly accelerated rate because of human activities. This impoverishes us all and weakens the ability of the living systems on which humanity depends to resist growing threats such as climate change. For example, a research article in the journal *Science* recently warned that [commercial fish and seafood species may essentially be depleted by 2048](#).

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, world leaders pledged to reduce the rate of loss of biodiversity by 2010 as a contribution to poverty eradication. However, biodiversity continues to disappear at an unprecedented rate. The current rate of extinction is estimated to be 1,000 times higher than would occur naturally. Halting and reversing the trend is vital.

If that is not done, and current loss rates continue, it is expected that an area of 1.3 billion hectares worldwide – about 1.5 times the area of United States – will completely lose its

original biodiversity levels by 2050. This rapid loss is being compounded by climate change. More than 30% of all known species may disappear before the end of this century as a result of climate change – the sixth global mass extinction of species and the first to be generated by human beings. The previous mass extinction, the Cretaceous-Tertiary event, which ended the era of the dinosaurs, occurred 65 million years ago.

Biodiversity loss is no longer solely an environmental issue. It is also an economic issue. In addition, biodiversity loss affects human health and the atmosphere. But most of the world's population -- and most policy makers -- are unaware of the impact and consequences of this decline in the ability of the planet to continue providing the goods and services that many of us take for granted .

It is for this reason that the United Nations General Assembly declared 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity. The idea is to engage people the world over in the fight to protect life on Earth. The purpose of the International Year is to raise public awareness of the importance of biodiversity and the consequences of its destruction. The Year also will seek to promote the engagement of the public and other actors for the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity. In addition, the Year will celebrate progress towards reducing the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. The objective is to obtain a commitment by the global community to reinforce implementation of the Convention.

The end result of the celebration of the International Year will be action at various levels as a result of targeted public awareness and political awareness campaigns carried out in collaboration with a number of partners.

The International Year of Biodiversity offers an excellent opportunity to increase understanding of the vital role that biodiversity plays in sustaining life on Earth and to draw attention to what people are doing all over the planet to safeguard this irreplaceable natural wealth and reduce biodiversity loss.

"Postponing action to protect life on earth is not an option. There is a need to act now to achieve the changes vital to the well-being of all life on Earth." – Dr. Ali Treki, President of the 64th United Nations General Assembly

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