



# Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity



**Message from Dr. Ahmed Djoghlaif**  
**Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**  
**on the occasion of the**  
**International Conference on Forests, Bioenergy and Climate Change**  
**Casablanca, Morocco, March 2008**

Distinguished Participants,

Until now, years of observation and data collection have allowed scientists to discern trends and make reliable predictions to facilitate effective forest management and conservation. However, with the reality of climate change taking hold, these trends and predictions no longer provide sufficient information. Climate change has introduced many new variables: managers must adapt their techniques accordingly and decision makers have to act in situations of increasing complexities and uncertainties. Every field is facing new hurdles for which solutions have yet to be assessed and tested. As such, your conference to assess and exchange information on the impacts of climate change and bioenergy on forest management and conservation is a welcome initiative—indeed an imperative. I would like to convey my greetings to the distinguished participants in this International Conference on Forests, Bioenergy and Climate Change. I welcome the theme of this event as it is of high relevance to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and our work for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and the equitable sharing of the benefits from its use.

Intact forest ecosystems have an immense recreational, cultural, spiritual, and aesthetic value, in addition to important economic value of timber and non-timber forest products. The conservation and sustainable use of forest biodiversity, and the equitable sharing of its benefits, are vital for our quality of life and are key to overcoming the challenges of global climate change. Indeed, forests account for as much as 80 per cent of the total above-ground terrestrial carbon, while peatlands, which only cover 3 per cent of the world's land surface, store 30 per cent of all global soil carbon or the equivalent of 75 per cent of all atmospheric carbon. As such, healthy forests and wetland systems have the potential to capture a significant portion of projected emissions. Additionally, ecosystems can better withstand the expected impacts of climate change when they are rich in biodiversity, and the conservation and restoration of carbon-rich ecosystems such as wetlands and forests can be very cost-effective carbon-offset measures, while providing considerable co-benefits for sustainable livelihoods and for biodiversity conservation.

Yet, millions of hectares of the world's forests are still being each year lost as a result of to deforestation. Despite global, regional and national action to support the conservation and sustainable use of forests, we are still losing an estimated 9.4 million hectares of forests per year, or 18 hectares per minute. In fact this represents all the forests here in Morocco, or 8 per cent of the national territory. Deforestation is currently estimated to be responsible for 20 per cent of the annual human induced carbon dioxide emissions. The urgency of concerted, comprehensive and focused action to halt biodiversity loss in forest ecosystems is well understood and broadly recognized. The CBD's expanded programme of work on forest biological diversity provides a basis for these actions.

The Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, in cooperation with the secretariats of our two sister conventions—the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)



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and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)—has prepared a joint report on the important role of forests for achieving the objectives of the three conventions. More specifically, the CBD and the UNFCCC collaborate on issues related to the Nairobi work programme on impacts, vulnerability and adaptation to climate change. Further collaborative action is being undertaken on reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries (RED-DC) and approaches to stimulate action. Additionally, a win-win scenario for the economic use and the conservation of forests is the concept of Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD), which can be achieved with substantial co-benefits for biodiversity, and for local economic development.

The CBD Secretariat is supporting the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility in their efforts to harness these co-benefits. The CBD and the UNCCD are also joining forces with regard to the biodiversity of dry and sub-humid lands. These ecosystems are vulnerable to the combined effects of biodiversity loss, desertification and climate change. Since these areas are usually dominated by agricultural activities, there are also significant linkages to the CBD programme of work on agricultural biodiversity. Indeed, such issues will be explored at the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, which will be held in Bonn from 19 to 30 May this year. A high level segment with the participation of Heads of State and Government will be held on 28-30 May.

The role of biodiversity in climate-change mitigation is an opportunity that we should not underestimate. The use of bioenergy, derived from renewable sources and considered to be carbon-neutral, is another contribution of biodiversity to greenhouse-gas reduction. The emerging development of liquid-biofuel production for transportation has been under particular focus recently. Indeed, biofuel production and use could generate a win-win-win situation for climate change mitigation, biodiversity and economic development. However, the greenhouse-gas reduction potential of biofuels ultimately depends on the associated land-use change, the type of biomass used and the associated production practices. If produced in a sustainable way, the use of biomass to produce bioenergy could efficiently mitigate climate-change impacts while enhancing biodiversity, especially on degraded lands. To this end, life-cycle assessments and environmental impact assessments should be carried out comprehensively before developing any biofuel production on a significant scale. Biofuel production should not be seen as a panacea, but as part of a “clean energy mix” that can sustain us in the future. We should ensure that bioenergy development is not pursued at the expense of sustainable forest management.

Conservation of forests includes a focus on protected areas as well. To support this programme of work, an informal network of donors, international organizations and non-governmental organizations has been created. The CBD Secretariat is joining forces with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and with the Secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) to support regional efforts for the sustainable use and conservation of forest biodiversity. The Global Objectives on Forests agreed by the UNFF aim to reverse the loss of forest cover, and to increase the area of protected forests, amongst others. These are necessary steps to achieve the 2010 biodiversity target of achieving a significant reduction in the rate of biodiversity loss. The FAO, UNFF and CBD will aim to work jointly in support of these ambitious government commitments and in support of activities at all levels.

Much has been achieved in the progress towards sustainable forest management, but more efforts are needed to reach the 2010 biodiversity target and to counteract the impacts of climate change. It is for this reason that the United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed 2010 as the International Year of Biological Diversity. Indeed, healthy forest ecosystems are our best insurance for a sustained quality of life. In this spirit, I wish this International Conference on Forests, Bioenergy and Climate Change every success.

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