

**Message of Luc Gnacadja,  
Executive Secretary, UN Convention to Combat Desertification  
on the occasion of the  
International Day on Biological Diversity  
22 May 2010**

We mark the International Day of Biological Diversity, on this International Year of Biodiversity, in the shadow of grim news. The latest edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook released on 10 May warns that despite modest successes in curbing deforestation, biodiversity loss is worsening. And the situation may deteriorate further, if the global policies to address climate change ignore land use change, the main driver behind man-made destruction of species in land-based ecosystems.

We must make every effort to preserve as much biological diversity as possible because we do not know the full extent of their genetic, economic and service provision potentials. Consider, for example, that biodiversity in the drylands is about half that of the tropics, but 29-45% of the world's cultivated plants, among them cabbage, wheat, rye, barley, cotton, olives and sorghum, originated from the drylands. Therefore, biodiversity conservation also needs to be taken seriously in desert and drylands ecosystems that may be ignored because of their limited variety of species.

And in focusing on rare species, we must not forget those in abundance. In grassland areas, for example, the bulk of the ecosystem services, such as water regulation and nutrient production, is provided by a small number of species that are in abundant supply, while the rare species of most interest to conservationists account for only a small fraction of these kinds of functions.

Of all the world's ecosystems that have suffered long-term neglect, soil biodiversity tops the list. Estimates suggest that the global community loses 1 trillion dollars every year from the improper management and degradation of soil biodiversity worldwide.

Land degradation in the drylands, commonly known as desertification, has taught us that the loss of land productivity and biological diversity in this ecosystem is largely due to a serious neglect of the soil's biodiversity. Drylands may have only sprawling grasslands and clusters of bushes that spot the landscape, but the activity of a host of organisms, from termites, bacteria, ground-dwelling mammals to algae, fungi, microbes and plant roots in the soil is responsible for soil formation, quality and health, and for naturally regulating the climate by fixing carbon.

Through efforts to restore degraded land, we have also learned that giving priority attention to the soil's biodiversity ultimately leads to a restoration of healthy land cover. For these reasons, the observance of the World Day to Combat Desertification on 17 June this year will focus on soil biodiversity. We want the world to know that enhancing soils anywhere enhances life everywhere.

I pay tribute to the Convention on Biological Diversity for their tireless and successful efforts, over the last 18 years, keeping the international community focused on the plight of the world's biological diversity. The UNCCD remains committed to our continued collaboration.