

# Informationsdienst der Bundesstadt Bonn

## Bonn – Diversity for Diversity

"Biological diversity needs our commitment!" With this clear call for action, the city of Bonn has positioned itself as a responsible municipality and as a competent host for the 9<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP 9) to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). COP 9, the largest and most important UN conference held in Germany to date, is expected to bring some 5,000 delegates, and many press representatives, guests and other experts, to Bonn.

"We want to do more than simply be the site of the conference – we also want to be involved with the conference topic", notes Bonn's Mayor Bärbel Dieckmann, who is also the Chair of the World Mayors Council on Climate Change (WMCCC), in summarising the city's intentions. Bonn has often hosted negotiations on key emerging issues – including issues, such as climate change and desertification, that relate directly to biodiversity.

Bonn has shaped itself as a special site for international co-operation. The overarching motto "The UN in Bonn – for sustainable development world-wide" not only guides the efforts of the 17 UN organisations currently located in Bonn (including the UNFCCC and the UNCCD), it also colours the work of locally based scientific organisations, development services, businesses, media and non-governmental organisations and – of course – of the city of Bonn itself.

With this orientation, Bonn has been identifying with the COP's topic focuses even as it has been supporting the conference logistically. The conference has inspired the city to become intensively involved with biodiversity issues. As part of that involvement, Bonn has initiated a biodiversity information and education campaign that, in turn, has profited from the energy surrounding the conference. The campaign, which has sought to reach as many of Bonn's citizens as possible, has been explaining a) what biodiversity is, b) why biodiversity is of infinite value and c) what we all need to do to help protect it.

Numerous relevant events, special efforts and informational programmes have taken place in the last few months. The campaign's central emphases have included efforts to reach children, adolescents and educators – and to explain how biodiversity relates to everyday life, in order to help the public understand the global contexts involved. Projects such as "KinderKunstKinder", which includes workshops, an "action day", "traffic art" and an art display at the conference site, have been highlighting the degree to which children and adolescents identify with and relate to the issue. On the 1<sup>st</sup> weekend in May, some 140 children will participate in the "children's summit" of Young Naturefriends Germany (Naturfreundejugend Deutschlands) and pose the following provocative question: "Are we

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going to buy another earth?". During the conference's high-level segment, young people from 15 different countries will come to the conference site for the "Go 4 Biodiv" International Youth Summit".

A "Local Action for Biodiversity" (LAB) project is making connections between local and global involvement. In this effort, cities on all continents are working together on relevant strategies and programmes and are sharing their pertinent experience with national and global audiences. Bonn's first biodiversity report, which provides the basis for developing a municipal biodiversity strategy, has been prepared in the LAB framework. Significantly, the individual components of the report have long been in place – the report has simply provided the overarching framework – i.e. "biodiversity" – for bringing them together.

In all probability, "cities and biodiversity" issues will become more and more important as time goes by. In light of the fact that 50 percent of the world's people already live in urban areas, cities will play a central role in deciding key issues affecting the human race. In other words, cities will have influence extending far beyond the municipal sphere. Ultimately, cities will be the key to success in achieving sustainable development, in managing the great challenges of climate change, desertification and poverty and in protecting biodiversity. Functioning ecosystems enhance the quality of life of municipal populations, and they help protect cities' inhabitants against the dangers of climate change, pollution, natural disasters and shortages of resources. Cities know that it is in their own best interest to act on behalf of sustainability and biodiversity.

And that is why many cities are making use of their sensible options in city planning and in their influential purchases of goods and services. Such cities are establishing pertinent standards, promoting awareness and initiating change. Their networks, such as the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) and the World Mayors Council on Climate Change (WMCCC), are making local resources and expertise available to the global debate. And because they assure the local success of global strategies, they are indispensable partners for national governments and international organisations in efforts to protect biodiversity and achieve sustainable development.

Soon, local efforts will be globally visible in Bonn: from 26-28 May 2008, mayors from throughout the world will come to Bonn, at the invitation of Bonn's mayor, to discuss cities' roles and involvement in protecting biodiversity. On 29 May, mayors from the cities of Bonn, Curitiba, Johannesburg, Montreal and Nagoya will present cities' contributions to the global debate to the plenary session of the high-level ministerial segment of COP 9.

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### **Bonn's diversity: valued and protected!**

Bonn, situated between Germany's central uplands and the Lower Rhine Bight, has a wide range of different landscape elements: river valleys and forests, wetlands, an extinct volcano and an inland dune.

In the course of the Bonn area's long settlement history, untouched nature gradually gave

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way to a wide spectrum of highly diverse cultural landscape elements. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such elements became a central focus for nature conservation. Bonn's Siebengebirge mountains are now one of Europe's oldest nature conservation areas.

Today, Bonn is surrounded by valuable natural areas, some of which – such as the Rheinland and Siebengebirge nature parks – extend into the city proper. Responsible, aware planning and design of open areas has maintained a balance between utilisation demands and the need to conserve nearby natural areas.

In order to protect forest areas and other habitats from construction, recreation, traffic, etc., large sections of the city's area have been placed under protection. Some areas have been placed within several different protection categories. To date, 28 % of the Bonn city area has been accorded landscape protection status, and a total of 23 % has been set aside for nature conservation (and almost all of these latter areas fall under the European Union's Fauna-Flora-Habitat Directive).

Bonn's "green heart" contains parks, cemeteries, tree-lined avenues, gardens, schoolyards and hidden courtyards and an enormously diverse mosaic of small habitat structures such as cracks in walls and strips of vegetation along pathways.

All in all, even though Bonn has a population of over 314,000 (2,223 per km<sup>2</sup>), Bonn's diversity of species and habitats greatly exceeds the central European average.

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