

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY  
FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY****22 May 2006**

Biodiversity permeates the entire spectrum of mankind's activity and habitation, and is directly linked to the well being of our planet and long-term human progress.

Yet this vital pillar of life is under relentless attack. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, a four-year undertaking by more than 1,300 scientists, provides clear evidence of the damage being done to our world: Earth's environment has changed tremendously in the last half century. The findings point to the need for decisive action to protect our planet.

This year's observance, "*Protect Biodiversity in Drylands*", highlights an area in particular need of urgent attention. The degradation of drylands—which constitute 40 per cent of the planet's land surface—is having dramatic effects: some 2,300 species endangered or facing extinction, significant losses in agricultural output, and an economic cost estimated at more than forty-two billion dollars a year.

These consequences are especially troubling because they are borne disproportionately by the world's poorest and most vulnerable people. Drylands host eight of the ten least-developed countries in the world, and developing nations are home to the overwhelming majority of the two billion people who rely on dryland ecosystems. As a result, their decline has far-reaching implications for our efforts to fight poverty, hunger and disease. Indeed, significant steps to preserve drylands will help determine whether we will achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

One such step is the need to reverse desertification, a process which not only exacerbates poverty but is also partly caused by it. This year's biodiversity commemoration coincides with the International Year of Deserts and Desertification. These two complementary observances illustrate the strong links between environmental issues, and highlight the need for a comprehensive and global approach to address these concerns.

On this International Day for Biological Diversity, let us resolve to do more to protect the biodiversity on which our planet depends. Let us commit ourselves to safeguarding our drylands, and let us work together to achieve the goal of a significant reduction in the rate of biodiversity loss by the year 2010.