



Achieving the
2010
Biodiversity
Target

**MESSAGE FROM DR. AHMED DJOGHLAF, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY,
ON THE OCCASION OF THE INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY 2006**

12 August 2006



« We are diversity »

Brazilian school children in a letter
to the Executive Secretary, March
2006

**EMPOWERING YOUTH FOR POVERTY ERADICATION
IS KEY TO BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION**

Today is a day of celebration for youth, but it is also my hope that it will be a reminder of youth's central place as bearers of tomorrow's solutions. The theme of this year's International Youth Day, "Tackling Poverty Together", is a timely reminder of the need to join forces to stop the loss of life and its diversity on our planet and, with it, our permanent natural wealth. The recently released second edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook provides ample evidence that human activity is putting such a strain on the Earth's natural functions and that the ability of the planet's ecosystems to sustain future generations can no longer be taken for granted. This confirms the finding of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment on the links between poverty eradication and biodiversity. The Assessment, produced in 2005, underlined the increasing and alarming loss of biodiversity and documented the fact that healthy and biodiverse ecosystems are the foundation for human well-being. It also called for concerted action, for joining forces, since biodiversity loss is driven by local, regional, and global factors—such as poverty—to which responses are needed at all levels.

This global scientific study involving over 1,300 experts from 95 countries concluded that out of the 24 services provided by healthy ecosystems, 15 are in decline, including the provision of fresh water, marine fisheries production, natural hazard regulation, and the ability of the atmosphere to cleanse itself of pollutants. The Millennium Assessment also concluded that the consequences of biodiversity loss and ecosystem disruption are often harshest for the poor since they are the most immediately

dependent on local ecosystem services for their livelihoods. The poor are often the least able to access or afford substitutes for these services.

Against this background, for biodiversity conservation to contribute fully to poverty alleviation and the Millennium Development Goals, a shift is needed to people-centered approaches that build on poor people's priorities and capabilities. A shift is also needed to successfully engage youth in addressing the underlying policy and institutional drivers of environmental degradation; and to empower them with the resources, rights, and entitlements they need to improve their lives. According to the United Nations *World Youth Report 2005*, 515 million young people live on less than \$2 a day. This represents 45% of the young people in the world! Clearly, sustainable economic development depends upon the participation of young people.

Young people continue to live in dreadful conditions all around the world, and tackling poverty is not a small task. Nevertheless, concentrating our efforts on poverty alleviation will have multiple positive ripple effects, including the protection of the richness of the natural world. For a reduction in the rate of biodiversity loss to contribute to poverty alleviation, priority would need to be given to protecting the biodiversity that is of particular importance to the well-being of poor and vulnerable people. Recently, the newly designated Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, Achim Steiner, said: "for too long economics and environment have seemed like players on rival teams". He added that economic incentives and international agreements can be made to work in a way which is "pro-environment, pro-poor and thus pro-sustainable development".

If young people decide to take the place they deserve in society as the primary stewards of a fragile planet, it will be impossible for them to neglect the value of just and harmonious human relations. Harmonious societies are those in which there is a balance between economic, social and environmental concerns. Such societies would be convivial, more equitable, sustainable and prosperous for generations. Many young people underline their desire to collectively attain this goal and are actually engaging in making a difference in their communities. This is encouraging because such thinking, linked to action is the cradle of social responsibility, one that nurtures a promising outlook on life that places emphasis on collective concerns, including the pursuit of global equity. The flexibility and adaptability of young people allows them to benefit from opportunities of a globalization modelled along those lines.

The strong presence of children and youth representatives at the eighth ordinary meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on Biological Diversity, which was held in Curitiba, Brazil last March, exemplifies this positive shift and is most welcomed by the Secretariat. The concerns of young people were communicated to the High-Level Segment of the Conference of the Parties. Among the serious concerns expressed in a message from the school children of Curitiba, a beautiful note, filled with meaning, reads: "*We are diversity*".

Thankfully, the “everyone for themselves” mindset is changing among the youth. This mindset inevitably results in a less cohesive world vision; one in which understanding global issues with a “them-*versus*-us” attitude is more likely, one in which we do not realize biological diversity is in the realm of the “us”, one of common concern, one that we must tackle together.

And together we shall win the battle for life on Earth.
