



Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

MESSAGE

From the Executive Secretary,
Ahmed Djoghlaif

On the occasion of International Youth Day
12 August 2007

22 May 2007
International Day for Biological Diversity



Biodiversity and Climate Change

For information only

EMPOWERING YOUTH: BE SEEN, BE HEARD: YOUTH PARTICIPATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

Successfully engaging youth in addressing the underlying policy and institutional drivers of environmental degradation and, in particular, biodiversity loss, and empowering them with the resources, rights and entitlements they need to improve their lives is essential for the future well-being of our planet. Sustainable economic development depends upon the participation of young people.

Youth, the primary stewards of our fragile planet, need to fully engaged in protecting and preserving our life on Earth. For this to happen, we need to strengthen the opportunities for them to become actively involved in the decision-making of government-supported organizations and NGOs, thus making this year's theme—Be Seen, Be Heard: Youth Participation for Development—even more relevant. The mobilization and support of local youth organizations are critical to achieving the Millennium Development Goal of ensuring environmental sustainability.

Environment and development go hand in hand. The natural environment must be maintained and preserved for both present and future generations, and the causes of environmental degradation must be addressed. Sustainable development is a key element in the programmes of youth organizations throughout the world.

Although each level of society is responsible for the environmental integrity of the community, young people have a special interest in maintaining a healthy environment as they will inherit it. Hence, it is critical that we integrate environmental education and training into school curricula.

Governments should encourage and assist youth organizations to initiate and develop youth-to-youth contacts through town-twinning and similar programmes in order to share the experience gained in different countries; initiate programmes to promote participation in tree planting, forestry, combating desert creep, waste reduction, recycling and other sound environmental practices. The participation of young people and their organizations in such programmes can provide good training and encourage awareness and action.

For example, not only did this year's celebrations of the International Day for Biological Diversity feature more countries participating than ever



before, but, more importantly, in all the countries youth were key participants in the celebrations. Activities that youth participated in included nature walks, art competitions and tree planting. In one country, a nation-wide competition involved students recording the kinds of traditional crop, fruit and vegetable varieties that can still be found in the kitchen gardens of their villages/towns. Students needed to collect the traditional/local name of the plant, describe its characteristic features, why people grow/plant that variety or whether there is any specific cultivation method, thus affording them the opportunity to draw from the experience and knowledge of the older generation living in the countryside.

As expressed in the Youth Accord on Biodiversity submitted to the United Nations General Assembly in 2005: “We are today’s tomorrow. What happens today does not just affect the future, it is the future. There are plants and animals living today that have not yet been discovered, that may never be discovered, because of our carelessness and thoughtless aspirations. We need to allow for the existence of all species on this planet.”

To achieve the three objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity—conserving our biological diversity, sustainably using its components and ensuring the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits from the use of genetic resources—and to reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010, I call on the youth of the world to be fully engaged in its implementation at a time when the Parties, countries of which you are citizens, have actively embarked on a new and exciting phase of its existence, a phase aimed at translating its objectives into practical achievements to tackle the day-to-day challenges of our global village.

Montreal 10 August 2007