

**Message of Luc Gnacadja
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**International Biodiversity Day
Forest Biodiversity
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On this tenth anniversary of the International Biodiversity Day we are called to reflect on the theme, 'Forest Biodiversity'. So, my key message today is this: to preserve our forests and its biodiversity, we must think and operate outside the box.

Consider that about 40% of the Earth's tropical and subtropical landmass is open or closed forest. Of this, 42% is dry forest, 33% is moist forest and 25% is wet and rain forest. However, forests hardly feature on our priority lists when drylands are mentioned even though nearly 18% of the land in arid zones is covered by forests. Experts claim that given the multiple roles they perform, arid zone forests are perhaps more important than forests elsewhere, and with good reason.

First, drylands are home to the world's largest diversity of mammals whose survival, literally, hangs on the arid zone forests. We know that at least 15 species have disappeared completely from the wild, and that over 2,300 species are threatened or endangered. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, between 25 and 40 percent of the mammals in the national parks may become endangered. Also, up to 2% of the species currently classified as critically endangered may become extinct as a result of climate change.

Second, drylands are home to a large population of the world's poor, whose day-to-day survival also depends on the goods directly produced by its forests.

Third, it is thanks to the genetic resources of the drylands, including its forest biodiversity, that you and I have enjoyed food security thus far. To put it simply, the forest biodiversity in the arid zone forests is invaluable. This significance is not equally matched by the public discourse on the issue. In tandem, few financial investments are allocated for the arid zone forests compared to other forest ecosystems.

Fortunately, the major threats to the forest biodiversity in the drylands are well known, with poverty, agricultural expansion and inappropriate land use policies topping the list. However, the future of the forest biodiversity in the drylands remains bleak due to new and emerging trends, especially climate change and a population growth that is increasingly consumption-oriented.

To address the threats to the forest biodiversity in the arid zones, the UNCCD's 10-year strategic plan for the period 2008-2018 has specific provisions and expected outcomes for improving the conditions of the populations and ecosystems affected by land degradation, which leads to desertification. It promotes sustainable land and ecosystems management, measures that in turn address poverty, which is a major cause of forest biodiversity loss.

To ensure these goals are achieved, the parties to the Convention decided at their last Conference in Buenos Aires in 2009 that the reports submitted must show quantitatively, how things are changing on the ground. Therefore, starting next year, the reports will state the proportion of the population that is above the poverty line in the affected areas as well as the changes observed in land cover.

Since 2009, the parties have also taken steps to turn the use of sustainable land management techniques into a reality. As a start, the Convention's stakeholders have, to date, submitted over 230 best practices that describe a wide range of techniques that can increase forest cover, improve household living standards and promote biodiversity conservation. These techniques include indigenous technologies and practices such as the *Zai*, found in West Africa.

The countries affected by desertification have expressed interest in scientific support to assess and validate these technologies so that they can be scaled up and scaled out to conserve arid zone forests and its biological diversity. These issues will be part of the agenda of the UNCCD's tenth session of the Conference of the Parties to be held in Changwon, Republic of Korea, from 10-21 October this year.

These challenges and requests speak to the need for an urgent and more proactive policy approach in the conservation of the arid zone forests in the developing countries, where the threat is highest. We, as an international community, must prioritize the allocation of finances for the long-term development of arid zone forests. It is through international cooperation that Europe's forests and its biodiversity were restored, following their destruction during the war. Thanks to international cooperation, we are enjoying the benefits of the biological diversity from the moist tropical forests.

If we invest in the conservation of arid zone forests and their biodiversity, I assure you of this: we will reap a high return from the multiple benefits we stand to gain. We will, at once, address five of the eight Millennium Development Goals. We will improve global food security and we will pass on the vast wildlife at our disposal as a heritage for future generations. But if we continue developing the current policy, where arid zone forests remain a secondary investment area, we can expect to lose the biological diversity in the drylands, and with it, an important forest ecosystem that may be one of the most difficult to ever recover.

Let me conclude by congratulating the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) for the progress made, to date, to raise awareness on the importance of all forest biodiversity. I also thank the CBD secretariat for the collaboration we have enjoyed over the last year in jointly promoting sustainable land management as the means to the long term sustainability of the drylands biodiversity.
