

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE FOR THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR BIODIVERSITY
22 May 2011

This year's observance of the International Day for Biodiversity falls during the 2011 International Year of Forests, declared by the United Nations General Assembly to educate the global community about the value of forests and the extreme social, economic and environmental costs of losing them.

The benefits of forests are far-reaching. Forests catch and store water, stabilize soils, harbour biodiversity and make an important contribution to regulating climate and the greenhouse gases that are causing climate change. They generate profits for international businesses and provide essential income and resources for hundreds of millions of the world's poorest people. Yet, despite our growing understanding and appreciation of just how much we reap from forests, they are still disappearing at an alarming rate. This year's International Day for Biological Diversity is devoted to highlighting the need for urgent action.

Last year, governments agreed on a new strategic plan for biodiversity at the Nagoya Biodiversity Summit in Aichi, Japan. The Aichi targets call for a significant reduction in the rate of loss, degradation and fragmentation of all natural habitats, including forests, by 2020. One of the important tools agreed in Japan is the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization. Forests contain a vast – and barely catalogued – store of biodiversity. The early ratification and implementation of this Protocol can support forest protection and the sustainable use of biodiversity. This, in turn, can contribute to poverty alleviation and sustainable national development.

As the ongoing climate change negotiations demonstrate, awareness is growing that reducing deforestation and forest degradation can play a large part in our response to the combined threat of climate change, biodiversity loss and land degradation. I commend this renewed emphasis on the importance of forests to sustainable development.

Nearly two decades ago, world leaders included the Rio Forest Principles as a major outcome of the Earth Summit, which also saw the birth of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Next year, governments will reconvene in Rio for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20). As we look forward to this landmark conference, I urge all sectors of society to re-commit to the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests for our collective future.