

## **Time now to act in good faith for the environment**

Joseph Deiss, *President of the 65<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly*

The year 2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity. It is the year that we celebrate the beauty of diverse species inhabiting the planet earth. It is also the year that we renew our efforts to protect these species, which are rapidly dwindling in number and kind due to excessive human encroachment. According to the most conservative estimate, the current species extinction rate is 100 times greater than the natural rate found in fossil records. Some scientists warn that up to half of all species on earth could disappear by 2100.

When biodiversity loss occurs, it is not just a few polar bears here and a few flowers there that disappear from the face of the earth. It is the very foundation of human life that becomes slowly but irreparably damaged because the whole system is interconnected. For millennia, our civilization has depended on the unique material, cultural and spiritual contributions of biological and genetic resources in developing our traditions and livelihoods. It has also relied upon nature's generosity to provide food security and counted on nature's buffers to guard against extreme weather events. However, with increasing biodiversity loss, we are losing all the benefits of nature, including its role in finding new cures for diseases and sustaining indigenous populations.

Recognizing the urgency of the situation, the international community agreed at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg to significantly reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. Incorporated into the Millennium Development Goal on environmental sustainability, the 2010 biodiversity target aims to contribute to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on earth. Unfortunately, none of the target's eleven goals has been fully achieved. Although many governments and relevant stakeholders have made concrete efforts to protect fragile ecosystems, the world as a whole still has a long way to go before biodiversity loss is reversed.

Raising global awareness

The International Year of Biodiversity and many events associated with it have raised

global public awareness on the importance of protecting biodiversity. From teenagers in Nairobi, where the United Nations Environment Programme is housed, to local officials in Nagoya, Japan, which will host the next Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in October 2010, global citizens have come to understand that there is a biodiversity crisis that must be urgently addressed. Such concern will be underscored at the September's High-level event on biodiversity at the United Nations General Assembly in New York. For the first time in the organization's history, Heads of State and Government will gather to provide political impetus to the ongoing discussions and activities on biodiversity.

It is also encouraging that just this past June, representatives of Governments agreed to endorse the establishment of an Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) in Busan, Republic of Korea, as a means to enhance science-policy interface for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. This joint decision is symbolic of the strong interest and political will that prevail in countries around the world to forge a way of living more harmoniously with nature.

The recent findings of The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) study have further added empirical evidence in favor of taking action to preserve biodiversity. The study concludes that it makes economic sense to prevent and protect our ecosystem rather than exploit and repair it.

In sum, the year 2010 has seen a convergence of public awareness, rigor of science, and policy debate on the alarming loss of biodiversity. All we need now is to act. Act in good faith that efforts we make now will not only save endangered animals and plants but will vastly improve our collective standard of living. Act with a long-term view that the richness of nature in the forms of tropical forests and salt marshes will greatly boost the fight against climate change. More importantly, we must act to fulfill our moral obligation to pass on to our future generations an earth teeming diverse species on land, water and the sky.

It is my sincere hope that the International Year of Biodiversity, which will also set post-2010 strategic framework and programme, will indeed become a year of international action and cooperation that marks a historic turnaround in biodiversity trends. Let us remember that biodiversity is life, our life.