

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
22 May 2014

This year's International Day for Biological Diversity falls in the International Year of Small Island Developing States and is being observed under the theme of "Island Diversity".

For some 600 million island-dwellers -- nearly one-tenth of the world's population and representing one in three United Nations Member States -- biodiversity is integral to their subsistence, income, well-being and cultural identity.

Half the world's marine resources lie in island waters. Biodiversity-based industries such as tourism and fisheries account for more than half the gross domestic product of small island developing states. Coral reefs alone provide an estimated \$375 billion annual return in goods and services. Many island species on land and sea are found nowhere else on Earth. Legacies of a unique evolutionary heritage, they hold the promise of future discoveries -- from medicines and foods to biofuels.

Yet, reflecting a global pattern, island biodiversity is being lost at an unprecedented rate in the face of growing risks. Rising sea levels caused by climate change, ocean acidification, invasive alien species, overfishing, pollution and ill-considered development are taking a heavy toll. Many species face the prospect of extinction. People's livelihoods and national economies are suffering.

The process to define a post-2015 development agenda and the Third Conference on Small Island Developing States in Samoa in September of this year both offer opportunities to attend to the unique needs of small island developing states and reverse the global decline in biodiversity. Because of their vulnerability, small island developing states are demonstrating a growing understanding of the links between healthy ecosystems and human well-being. Many have made local, national and regional commitments to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity, including through ratifying important instruments such as the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization. I call on all countries around the world to follow suit and ratify the Protocol without delay.

Around the world, many innovative partnerships are being forged to preserve marine and coastal resources, enhance resilience to climate change and develop sustainable tourism, fisheries and other industries. On this International Day, let us commit to adopting, adapting and scaling up best practices so we can protect fragile ecosystems for the benefit of all the islanders -- and indeed people everywhere -- who depend on them.