

Address by the Hon. Minister of Environment, Natural Resources, Physical Planning and Fisheries on the occasion of world environment day, June 5, 2010

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On June 5, 2010, Dominica together with other nations, international organizations, and human communities in the world, commemorate World Environment Day.

This is an annual major international event for the environment launched by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) more than 37 years ago, and this event has become an essential activity to promote environmental education and to stimulate awareness of the immense value of the natural resources to which we are endowed. The day also affords us the opportunity to celebrate the tremendous efforts expended in protecting existing natural resources but more importantly, a day to examine and reflect on management activities which are critical to the sustainability of these resources.

The theme of this year's World Environment Day, "Many Species, One Planet, One Future", echoes the call of the International Year of Biodiversity to stop this mass extinction and raise awareness about the vital importance of the millions of species that inhabit our planet's soils, forests, oceans, coral reefs and mountains. Our health, well-being and sustainable future depend on this intricate, delicate web of ecosystems and life.

Biodiversity, the incredible variety of life on Earth that sustains us, is in peril. Species are becoming extinct at the fastest rate ever recorded. Most of these extinctions are tied to human activities that are polluting and depleting water resources, changing and degrading habitats, introducing invasive and alien species and altering the global climate.

Humans depend upon biodiversity in many ways, both to satisfy basic needs like food and medicine, and to enrich our lives culturally or spiritually. Yet in an increasingly modern, technological world, people often forget how fundamental biodiversity is to daily life and are unaware of the impact of its loss.

This variety of life plays an important role in the way ecosystems function and in many ways render services such as nutrients and water cycling, soil formation and retention, resistance against invasive species, pollination of plants, regulation of climate as well as pest and pollution control by ecosystems.

For us in Dominica, the conservation and protection of our ecosystems and species is deeply entrenched in the national values of our people. Indeed, the country has accepted our rich biodiversity as a basis for sustainable national development. In recognition of the need to conserve and protect these vulnerable resources, we have established from 1975 a system of national parks and protected areas that presently cover in excess of 20% of our land area.

In July of 1994, the Government signed on to the Biological Diversity Convention which represent a shared commitment to conservation of biodiversity and sustainable use of biological resources and fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the use of genetic resources.

The Dominica's Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan prepared over eight years ago was intended to implement the country's obligation under the convention.

Dominica and other Caribbean Islands however continue to grapple with the Loss of Biodiversity, exacerbated by Land Degradation, Ozone Layer Depletion, Hazardous Chemical Pollution and Climate Change.

The community of nations are well aware of the threat to humanity posed by these environmental issues and have formulated treaties to protect the environment and human lives. The Government of Dominica has signed on to many of this agreements and through the Environmental Coordinating Unit of the Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources, Physical Planning and Fisheries, local, regional and international assistance, management programmes have been prepared for mitigation and adaptation.

Our planet therefore needs more than just action by governments and corporations; it needs each of us. Although individual decisions may seem small in the face of global threats and trends, but when billions of people join forces in common purpose, we can make a tremendous difference.

So as we observe World Environment Day 2010, let us play our part and make a commitment to be more environmentally responsible and engage in activities which will encourage others to protect life on earth.

We need also to remember that each of us need to create greater environmental awareness among Dominicans, in order to positively change behavior as we strive to put our country at the forefront of environmental sustainability in the Caribbean.