



CONFERENCE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS OF THE ARCTIC REGION

Statement by Dr. Ahmed Djoghlaif
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are here today because we know that the world is on a path to self-destruction and we want to change its course. As we all know, clean water and air, pollination of crops, food, buffers from floods and storm surges, non-proliferation of infectious diseases, cultural values, raw materials to meet consumer demands—all of these things that so many of us take for granted—are the direct result of an incredible diversity of plant and animal species and their intricate interactions. Together, they provide the ecosystem services that ensure the well-being of humanity.

Yet in the same breath, we are destroying the very resources that sustain our lives and livelihoods. According to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, the pressures on the planet's natural functions caused by human activity, have reached such a high level that the ability of ecosystems to satisfy the needs of future generations has been seriously, and perhaps irreversibly, compromised.

As climate change progresses, another human-induced change, more and more species and fragile habitats become threatened with extinction. The fourth assessment report issued in 2007 by the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), demonstrates that up to 30 per cent of all known species are likely to be at increased risk of extinction before the end of this century.

At the United Nations General Assembly, following her appointment as Special Envoy of the Secretary General on Climate Change, the visionary and consensus builder, Mrs. Gro Harlem Brundtland, stated, "It is irresponsible, reckless and deeply immoral to question the seriousness of the situation. The time for diagnosis is over and the time for action is now".

Arctic regions are now experiencing some of the most rapid and severe climate change on Earth, which will contribute to global environmental and socio-economic changes - many of which have already begun.

During the 20th century, Arctic air temperatures increased by approximately 5 degrees C. This increase is ten times faster than the observed global-mean surface temperature. An additional warming of about 4-7 degrees C in the Arctic is predicted for the next 100 years.

As you know, the Arctic is particularly threatened by climate change. Arctic species and societies have developed very specialized adaptations to the harsh conditions found at the poles, thus making them extremely vulnerable to dramatic changes in these conditions.

Walrus, polar bears, seals and other marine mammals that rely on sea ice for resting, feeding, hunting and breeding are particularly threatened by climate change.

The consequences of climate change are becoming more visible in the Arctic, and are greatly influencing the environment, animals and the living conditions of humans, especially the indigenous peoples who strongly depend on ecosystems and natural resources.



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The livelihood of indigenous peoples in the Arctic is already being affected by climate change. Losses in biodiversity affect the traditional practices of indigenous people, particularly fishing and hunting. For example, the Saami people have observed changes in reindeer grazing pastures, and the Inuit people of Canada have observed reductions in the ringed seal population, their single most important source of food.

Indigenous and local communities' traditional knowledge, innovations and practices are an inseparable part of their culture, social structures, economy, livelihoods, beliefs, health and their relationship to the local environment. It is the totality of all such elements that makes their knowledge, innovations and practices vital in relation to biological diversity and sustainable development.

Biodiversity and climate change are closely linked, and each impacts upon the other. The Prime Minister of Norway, HEM Jens Stoltenberg, in his article for the third publication of *Gincana*, stressed the connection between biodiversity and climate change when he noted that, "Climate change and biodiversity are strongly interlinked. Climate change affects biodiversity and biodiversity can affect the world's climate, most importantly when forests are lost. Active management and preservation measures aimed at protecting biodiversity cover a wide range of measures which also have the effect of mitigating climate change." Thus both issues require our attention.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) establishes the international framework for biodiversity conservation and very early on looked into the relationship between biodiversity and climate change. The CBD, through its cross-cutting issue on climate change, integrated climate change components in almost all of the programmes of work of the Convention. The Secretariat of the Convention has also initiated an exhibition of indigenous and local communities highly vulnerable to climate change, as well as an International expert meeting on responses to climate change for indigenous and local communities and the impact on their traditional knowledge related to biological diversity in the Arctic region, which was held in Helsinki, Finland, 25-28 March 2008.

The eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity noted with concern that indigenous and local communities, particularly those in the Arctic, small islands and high altitudes, are highly vulnerable to climate change, and also that indigenous and local communities, in maintaining healthy ecosystems and other practices, can mitigate against climate change.

At the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD, Parties considered recommendations on a range of issues relating to biodiversity and climate change. In particular, Parties discussed how to better integrate of climate change within all programmes of work of the Convention in order to ensure that the objectives of the Convention can be achieved, even under changing climatic conditions.

Parties also considered ways to link climate change discussions within the CBD with the work being conducted within the other Rio Conventions: the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.



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All this being said, while international mobilization is key to creating the political will necessary to achieve the objectives of the CBD, all international agreements are only as strong as their Parties' plans for on-the-ground implementation in their own countries. To achieve this, the Convention requires, under Article 6(a), that each Contracting Party develop a national biodiversity strategy and action plan (NBSAP) for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. Without a clear map to direct conservation initiatives, individual projects, while locally successful, may not contribute to the enhancement of nation-wide endeavours, and ultimately are less effective than might be otherwise. More than this, however, a national strategy gives decision makers the mandate to push for laws, educational programmes, and budgets, among other things, that support the protection of biological diversity.

We must also recognize, that if parliamentarians do not put in place governance tools to ensure implementation of national biodiversity strategies and action plans and continued participation in the international arena, biodiversity will continue to be lost. Thus, political engagement is key to achieving the goals of the CBD.

What is lost in one country is lost to the world. Individual efforts by communities, regions, nations, and organizations must be brought together so as to ensure that activities around the world are supporting each other rather than counteracting each other. Neither flora nor fauna adhere to human-drawn borders and thus initiatives at each level must be mutually reinforcing and require dialogue and cooperation. This is the important role played by the Convention on Biological Diversity. Our mandate is to encourage, support, and demand actions to conserve biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources. Only through synergistic action and social solidarity will we reverse biodiversity loss.

At the same time, it is important to bear in mind, however, that politicians also receive mandates from the people. If citizens do not perceive themselves as stakeholders in the ongoing loss of biodiversity, they will not support endeavours that work to reduce it.

As the world begins to respond to the current crisis of biodiversity loss, hand in hand with climate change, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity has a special role to play as a centre of excellence in international networking, information exchange and as an active and objective facilitator on inter-governmental decision-making processes and will be essential in assisting in the design and implementation of effective conservation strategies in partnership with Parties, Governments and indigenous and local communities – for the benefit of both peoples and nature.

It is also for this reason that the international community celebrated the International Day on Biological Diversity on 22 May 2007 under the theme “Biodiversity and Climate Change”. In his message delivered for this occasion, the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, reminded the international community that the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity is an essential element of any strategy to adapt to climate change. He also stated: “Through the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the international community is committed to conserving biodiversity and combating climate change. The global response to



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these challenges needs to move much more rapidly, and with more determination at all levels—global, national and local. For the sake of current and future generations, we must achieve the goals of these landmark instruments.”

The international community is called upon to redouble its effort for achieving the Johannesburg Biodiversity Target aimed at reducing substantially the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. The celebration in 2010 of the International Year for Biodiversity will offer a unique opportunity to keep the momentum generated by the International Polar Year.

To this end, I want to appeal to you today, to join the Convention of Biological Diversity in its efforts to raise public awareness about these issues, as part of our mutual efforts to save life on Earth. I would like to leave you with the words of Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, who once said, “A community is like a ship; everyone ought to be prepared to take the helm.”

Thank you for your kind attention.