

PRESS RELEASE

Celebrating the International Day for Biological Diversity

Montreal, 22 May 2009 – Invasive alien species (IAS) - one of the greatest threats to biodiversity, and to the ecological and economic well-being of society and the planet – is this year's theme for the International Day for Biological Diversity (IDB). This year, the event is being marked by a record number of countries around the world, a reflection of the growing recognition of the threat to biological diversity and its impact on human welfare.

In his IDB message, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon said: “The most cost-effective and feasible method of control is prevention. To be successful, this strategy requires collaboration among Governments, economic sectors and non-governmental and international organizations. A country can only prevent invasions if it knows which species may invade, where they may come from and the best management options for dealing with them.” He added, “Individuals, too, have a responsibility. Abiding by local and international quarantine and customs regulations will prevent the spread of insect pests, weeds and diseases. A simple rule applies: leave living organisms in their natural habitats and bring home only memories.”

Invasive alien species are species whose introduction and/or spread outside their natural habitats threaten biological diversity. While only a small percentage of organisms transported to new environments become invasive, their negative impacts on food security, plant, animal and human health and economic development can be catastrophic.

In the words of Mr. Achim Steiner, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), “Alien invasive species have for too long been given a free ride—raising awareness among policy makers and the public and accelerating a comprehensive response is long overdue.”

The problem of invasive alien species continues to grow, essentially due to global trade, transport and travel, including tourism, at an enormous cost to human and animal health and the socio-economic and ecological well-being of the world. The annual environmental losses caused by introduced agricultural pests in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, South Africa, India and Brazil have been calculated at over US\$ 100 billion. According to one study, the global estimation could be US\$1.4 trillion, which represents 5% of the global GDP.

An unwanted by-product of globalization, non-native species are harming ecosystem services, livelihoods and economies throughout the world. For example, the Government of South Africa spends approximately \$60 million per year in an attempt to eradicate plants, such as wattles, that are invading valuable farmland, river systems and economically important tourist sites such as the Cape Floral Kingdom.

In North America's Great Lakes, zebra mussels are affecting shipping, fisheries and electric power generation. Throughout the islands of the Pacific Ocean, rats from foreign ships are exterminating indigenous birds. In many countries in Africa, water hyacinth is clogging lakes and rivers, to the detriment of aquatic wildlife and the communities and industries that profit from it.

In his message for the International Day, Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, President of the current session of the United Nations General Assembly, said: “It is not too late to take individual and collective measures,

to respond to biodiversity loss in order to protect and sustain our daily needs and maintain our livelihoods.” He added that the continuing loss of precious biological diversity can no longer be considered simply an environmental issue, but emphasized that biodiversity should be viewed not only as the basis of life on Earth, but also that of our global economy.

The Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Mr. Luc Gnacadja, commended the efforts under the Convention on Biological Diversity to raise awareness and understanding of the significance of invasive alien species to biological diversity, the global economy and livelihoods of individuals and communities, stating that: “This is laudable, for a most important lesson that we have learned from the recent global health crisis such as SARS, the Avian flu, and, most recently the Swine flu is this: only through rapid information dissemination, and global awareness and cooperation can we tackle problems associated with invasive pathogens and species.”

At the IDB Symposium held on 22 May at the United Nations University (UNU) in Tokyo, Masayoshi Yoshino, Senior Vice-Minister for Environment of Japan, said: “The measures against invasive alien species need to take long-term approaches. Therefore the government needs to coordinate with various stakeholders including research institutes and private corporations on taking effective measures,” He also stated that the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, to be held in Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture, in Japan in 2010 will be an excellent opportunity to inform the public of how biodiversity relates to our daily life and to strengthen our will to hand it over to the next generation.

The Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Mr. Ahmed Djoghlaif said that: “The issue of invasive alien species is relevant to every type of ecosystem and central to the achievement of the three objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity – the conservation of biological diversity, its sustainable use, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources.”

He added that: “As we are only months away from 2010, the International Year of Biodiversity, and the target date for the 2010 biodiversity target, the urgency to tackle the intertwined challenges of biodiversity loss and sustained and sustainable economic growth is no more an option but rather an inescapable necessity. I am therefore very pleased to announce that the theme of the celebration of the 2010 international day on biodiversity which will coincide with the celebration of the International Year of Biodiversity is ‘biodiversity for development and poverty alleviation’. I invite all partners to contribute to objectives of these celebrations”

The International Day for Biological Diversity provides Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and those dealing with IAS, an opportunity to raise awareness of the issue and increase practical action to tackle the problem.

Examples of how countries are marking this year’s IDB:

- The city of Montreal will mark the day at the Biosphère de Montréal, where there will be a joint statement of the City of Montreal, the Government of Quebec, and the Government of Canada on invasive alien species and there will be a presentation on Biosphere exhibition on Invasive Alien Species
- The Japanese government is holding a symposium and an invasive alien species exhibit
- The city of Frankfurt through its Bio-Frankfurt Initiative contributed to the celebration by engaging all stakeholders
- In Ireland, the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government (National Parks and Wildlife Service) and environmental NGOs are organizing a series of nationwide activities during National Biodiversity Week, from 17 to 24 May

- Peru has declared this week, a biodiversity week
- In Ethiopia, the Institute of Biodiversity Conservation is marking the day through a number of events. These include a one-day workshop and field visit to sites where invasive species pose a major threat to biodiversity, the distribution of brochures, booklets, posters, etc. to relevant institutions working on IAS, raise awareness using the mass media such as the national television, radio, and newspapers
- In Benin, a number of activities are planned, including a workshop to assess the level of knowledge on invading alien species in Benin, a guided tour with the press of one of the sites colonized by invading alien species, and, the design and distribution of posters to raise awareness about invading alien species and sustainable management of biodiversity in general.

For more information: www.cbd.int/idb/2009/

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

Opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the Convention on Biological Diversity is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the equitable sharing of the benefits from utilization of genetic resources. With 191 Parties, the CBD has near-universal participation among countries committed to preserving life on Earth. The CBD seeks to address all threats to biodiversity and ecosystem services, including threats from climate change, through scientific assessments, the development of tools, incentives and processes, the transfer of technologies and good practices and the full and active involvement of relevant stakeholders including indigenous and local communities, youth, NGOs, women and the business community. The headquarters of the Secretariat of the Convention are located in Montreal. For additional information, please contact Marie Aminata Khan at +1 514 287 8701; email: marie.khan@cbd.int or Johan Hedlund + 1 514 287-6670; email: johan.hedlund@cbd.int.