



Secretariat of the
Convention on Biological Diversity

22 May 2007
International Day for Biological Diversity



Biodiversity and Climate Change

STATEMENT

by

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to the

3rd GLOBAL BOTANIC GARDENS CONGRESS

WUHAN, CHINA

16-20 APRIL 2007



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I would like to congratulate the organizers of this Congress—Botanic Gardens Conservation International, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the Hubei Provincial Government, the State Forestry Administration of China, and the Wuhan Municipal Government—for their excellent efforts. Congratulations also go to the Wuhan Botanical Garden for their hospitality in accepting to host this Congress at this magnificent location. I wish also to thank the Chinese Government for their generous support to this event, which is an indication of the Chinese people's continued support for environmental issues and biodiversity conservation.

This event brings together multiple stakeholders from a wide range of fields and expertise, including national, regional and international partners. It reconfirms the efforts by the botanic-gardens community to foster partnerships as the main vehicle for ensuring progress in halting the loss of biodiversity, and provides an example to the rest of the biodiversity community. Given that the direct causes of biodiversity loss—habitat change, overexploitation, the introduction of invasive alien species, nutrient loading, and climate change—show no sign of abating, it is critical that the general public, the private sector and governments work closely together to put in place mitigating measures for the benefit of mankind now and for the future generations. And the building of partnerships is one strategic key for doing this, as was highlighted by the process leading to the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals.

I am pleased to note that the theme of this Congress—reviewing the progress in the implementation of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation, especially within the context of the 2010 targets of the International Agenda for Botanic Gardens—is a key contribution to the Convention on Biological Diversity. Allow me to express my gratitude to Botanic Gardens Conservation International and the rest of the botanic-gardens community for their increased investment in enhancing the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity at all levels.

Botanic Gardens Conservation International has been an effective and tangible partner of the CBD Secretariat with secondment of a Programme Officer to support the implementation of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation for the past four years. This investment has enabled multiple gains for the Convention and other stakeholders. In addition, Botanic Gardens Conservation International has mobilized resources to the tune of over US\$ 50 million to support the implementation of the Strategy in various countries, especially developing countries. No doubt, through the elaboration of the International Agenda for Botanic Gardens, with the 2010 targets, the botanic-gardens community in the broader context, in turn has mobilized enormous resources to support national implementation of the Strategy.

Biodiversity is the foundation on which human lives entirely depend. Biodiverse ecosystems not only provide essential goods (food, water, fibre, medicines) but also irreplaceable services, including regulation of disease and soil erosion, purification of air and water, and opportunities for spiritual reflection. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment examined the state of our ecosystem services and found that 15 out of 24 of them are in decline. And, as both the Assessment and our own Global Biodiversity Outlook note, if we fail to take action to protect biodiversity and ecosystems, we will also be undermining our efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals.

Therefore, in 2002, the Parties to the Convention and the world leaders gathered at the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development committed themselves to achieving by 2010 “a significant reduction in rate of biodiversity loss, as a contribution to poverty alleviation and for the greater benefit of all life on Earth”. All Governments reconfirmed this commitment at the 2005 United Nations Millennium Summit.

I would also like to emphasize that, at its sixth meeting, in 2002, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity stressed the potential role of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation in contributing to poverty alleviation and sustainable development. While the sixteen outcome targets are ambitious, they also provide a useful framework for achieving the 2010 target of the Convention. It is therefore critical to build synergies and linkages to other national responses to emerging global agendas and biodiversity related conventions in addressing issues in the framework of the implementation of the Global Strategy in botanic gardens.

As biodiversity loss proceeds, we are learning more about biodiversity and its value to humanity. But we need to do more than just collect the necessary data and marshal the best information. We must make it available to decision makers and the public at large in a way that increases the global society’s understanding of the importance of biodiversity and empowers people and governments to act and fulfil their commitments.

This is the challenge that I bring to the botanic-gardens community. Many of your gardens are the window through public perception on biodiversity issues are brought in focus. Given the large number of visitors of all ages from students to elderly tourists, botanic gardens have a strategic position to fashion the attitudes and responses within its community and demonstrate the options for sustainability and change. There are already many gardens working effectively to do just this, but this needs to be scaled up considerably if we are to meet the 2010 target, secure biodiversity with related benefits for human well being.

Another important contribution of the botanic-gardens community may be linked to the celebrations of the International Day for Biological Diversity (IBD) on the 22 May 2007. On this day, Parties to the Convention are encouraged to develop and implement communication, education and public awareness campaigns based around a theme designated by the Secretariat. This year’s theme will be “biodiversity and climate change”. It serves to emphasize the links between biodiversity and climate change: the role of nature in mitigating climate change and its capacity to adapt to it.

It is noteworthy that the botanic-gardens community has already begun to consider means and ways for addressing the potential impact of climate change such as through the Gran Canaria Declaration on Climate Change and Plant Conservation, an outcome of a meeting organized in Gran Canaria by the Global Partnership for Plant Conservation to which Botanic Gardens Conservation International provides the Secretariat, and other stakeholders. Some priorities highlighted include the need for development of more detailed climate change modelling to detect potentially threatened species, implementation of adaptive management strategies in vulnerable ecosystems and sustainable management of existing natural vegetation to maintain carbon stocks and the

monitoring of new plantings intended to offset carbon emissions, to ensure their ecological suitability.

In line with the Strategic Plan of the Convention and the multi-year programme of work of the Conference of the Parties up to 2010, the seventh meeting of the Conference of Parties decided to undertake an in depth review of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation at its ninth meeting, to be held in Germany in 2008 (decision VII/31). Parties have been invited to provide information current status in the implementation of the Strategy, measures taken to enhance progress in the achievement of the targets and constraints encountered. The botanic-gardens community is well placed to provide useful inputs to this process at national level since, in some instances, botanic gardens are the most relevant institutions for implementing various targets of the Strategy especially those related to documentation, conservation assessments, *ex situ* conservation, education and public awareness, capacity-building and networking. Overall, the outcome of this Congress will in itself be a useful input into the global assessment of the progress in implementation of the Strategy, and I therefore look forward to receiving the report of this meeting.

Once again, I wish to reiterate the importance of linking the botanical gardens agenda to the existing global, regional and national priorities. It is critical that all stakeholders involved in the implementation of the convention advance the three objectives: conservation, sustainable use and equitable access to genetic resources and benefit sharing. Botanic gardens provide a strategic framework to address these three objectives in concert, and I therefore urge all of us here to enhance our investment especially in the second and third objectives. Further, while most botanic gardens have a strong *ex situ* focus, it worth noting that the challenges facing humanity now are multi-faceted; hence, the need to employ the ecosystem approach as holistic framework for implementation of the Convention, including the targets of the Strategy.

In the years leading up to 2010, I would like to call for further collaboration and support from the botanical community to fast track the achievement of the targets of the International Agenda, the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation as well as the 2010 biodiversity target and to engage more proactively other stakeholders at national level to address the challenge of climate change, and contribute to other biodiversity-related conventions and global priorities, such as the Millennium Development Goals.

On this note, I wish you a fruitful meeting and, as I mentioned earlier, look forward to receiving the report of this meeting as a contribution to the in-depth review of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation.
