



Convention on
Biological Diversity



STATEMENT

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CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

ON THE OCCASION OF

THE URBAN NATURE FORUM

12 JUNE 2009
EDMONTON, CANADA

Please check against delivery



ONE NATURE - ONE WORLD - OUR FUTURE
COP 9 MOP 4 Bonn Germany 2008



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Dear Mayor Mandel, Mr. Cadman, dear participants,

On my way to the Conference this morning, the taxi driver was telling me how green the City of Edmonton was; it contains 1,200 parks and 132 kilometres of bicycle path, and therefore it is one of the largest biological corridors in North America. It is also home to North America's largest municipally-owned urban parks, and has used an innovative approach to protect biodiversity.

Edmonton is an inspiring location for the Urban Nature Forum. Of particular interest is that the city has one of the world's largest concentrations of American elms still uninfected by Dutch elm disease. Indeed, Alberta as a whole remains free of this threat to biodiversity, and I am pleased to note that both the city and the province have taken measures to keep it that way. I am doubly pleased to note this fact because the theme for this year's International Day for Biological Diversity, celebrated less than a month ago, was invasive alien species – of which there is no example more notorious than Dutch elm disease. Keeping out this invader and threat to native flora has helped Edmonton retain much of its natural beauty.

Along with climate change, the challenge of protecting biodiversity is at the forefront of political attention today. The United Nations General Assembly declared 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity in recognition of the enormous significance of biodiversity for the citizens of the world. Biodiversity means health, fresh water, clean air, jobs, development, and protection against the negative effects of climate change. In the urban context, biodiversity means quality of life.

In April 2002 the national governments that are Parties to the Convention set an ambitious goal: to significantly reduce the rate of loss of biodiversity by 2010 by working through the many programmes of work on thematic and cross-cutting issues under the Convention. Today, just before the due date, it appears that in spite of all the valuable efforts and undeniable progress achieved by the Convention's 192 Parties, many components of the target have not been achieved – we are still losing this key asset, our biological wealth, including 57 per cent of all North American plant species, at a rate comparable to the extinction event that wiped out the dinosaurs 65 million years ago.

Such a large and critical challenge cannot be met by the efforts of Parties alone. We need new alliances and partnerships, and we need an integrated approach across all sectors of government, civil society, the private sector and the scientific community. Only when all levels of government cooperate under the same objectives, working with all other major groups, will we be ready to take on one of the biggest environmental challenges of our time, the loss of species, ecosystems and biological resources that constitute the *raison d'être* of the Convention.

This is the reasoning behind the launch, at last year's IUCN Congress in Barcelona, of the Global Partnership on Cities and Biodiversity, a cooperative platform of city governments, United Nations agencies, and civil society, with the goal of increasing the level of collaboration among all levels of government and other players for local action on biodiversity. This message will be taken to the next Conference of the Parties in Nagoya, Japan, in October 2010, where the city of Nagoya and Aichi Prefecture are planning the Nagoya Cities' Biodiversity Summit, on 25 and 26 of October, to contribute to the deliberations of the Parties.

In the campaign to preserve life on Earth, the political and institutional mandates of cities and local authorities are essential for success. For example, cities often manage surrounding watersheds and the delivery of freshwater, and biodiversity is a much more economic and efficient water depurator than any treatment centre. This point was made abundantly clear at the

recent World Water Forum in Istanbul, and is plainly demonstrated by the example of New York City, which is estimated to have saved billions of dollars by investing in watershed protection instead of building and operating water treatment plants. WWF estimates that as of 2008, over 30 per cent of the world's largest cities rely directly on protected areas for their drinking water, and a further 10 per cent obtain their water from sources that originate in protected watersheds and forested areas.

Cities are also increasingly put in charge of land-use planning, and therefore play a large role in determining the extent to which biodiversity is protected and sustainably used. A sizable proportion of the world's protected areas are under the management of local authorities, particularly in biodiversity hotspots. Cities also determine norms for construction, development, trade and authorize operating licenses for business: as most economic decision-makers are in cities, significant progress in preserving biodiversity can be made through partnerships between local governments and the private sector. Finally, cities are often responsible for decisions relating to urban infrastructure, energy and transportation, all of which have a large impact on climate change and biodiversity.

It should not be overlooked that cities and urban-dwellers also have an impact on the environment and biodiversity through sheer weight of numbers. More than 50 per cent of the world's population currently lives in cities, and 70 per cent will by 2030. As such, cities are the ultimate venue for consumer education and for engaging citizens in communication, education and public awareness campaigns which can ultimately change consumption habits and means of production.

One example of such a campaign is *The Green Wave*, an ongoing global project that encourages young people to make a difference in conserving biodiversity. Supported by Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, part of the initiative involves inviting children and youth in schools and groups worldwide to plant a tree at 10 a.m. local time on 22 May – the International Day for Biological Diversity – creating a “green wave” across time-zones. Participants then upload photos and text to *The Green Wave* website to share their tree-planting stories with others. An interactive map goes live in the evening at 20:10 local time, creating a second, virtual, “green wave”. This campaign supports the Billion Tree Campaign led by the United Nations Environment Programme. As we know, children and youth living in large cities do not always get a chance to see, touch and directly experience the importance of biodiversity. *The Green Wave* is an excellent way for urban youth to learn about the value of biodiversity and get hands-on experience preserving it.

Another important project that aims to establish a connection between urban citizens and their natural environment is The Urban Biosphere Network, or URBIS. A joint collaboration between UNESCO and the Stockholm Resilience Centre, the project seeks to create an international network of urban areas that preserve biodiversity by through the use of local knowledge and interdisciplinary science. The concept of biosphere reserves, with its strong links to the Convention's ecosystem approach, is particularly useful when applied to the urban context, as it allows and encourages urban dwellers to consider the implications of decisions taken by local governments on surrounding ecosystems.

Let me here pay tribute to ICLEI as a pioneer in the field of urban biodiversity, with its 21 cities cooperating in the Local Action for Biodiversity project. Since 2006 these pioneering cities – among which are three members of the Steering Committee of the Global Partnership, Bonn, Nagoya and Curitiba – have not only been addressing the problem of biodiversity loss individually, but have also been exchanging their results and experiences with each other. As a result, ICLEI-LAB will publish a manual on biodiversity for cities and local authorities, and the

Secretariat looks forward to cooperating on disseminating the lessons learned. I would like, once again, to convey my gratitude to Countdown 2010, and Mr. Stephen Granger in particular for having facilitated, as early as September 2006 in Paris, the collaboration between LAB and the CBD Secretariat.

“Think globally, act locally” is a now-famous adage in the environmental movement. The Convention strives to embody this wisdom by acknowledging the critical role of cities and local authorities in struggle to preserve biodiversity. At the ninth meeting of our Conference of the Parties in May 2008 in Bonn, Germany, the Parties to the Convention adopted decision IX/28, which encourages Parties to support cities and local authorities in developing strategies and action plans on biodiversity, consistent with national policies. It also invites Parties to engage local governments in the application of the CBD programmes of work and in the achievement of the targets set under the Convention.

Meeting the decision halfway, cities have taken the lead in the 2007 Curitiba Declaration and the Bonn Call for Action adopted at the Mayors’ Conference at the margins of the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention. We should all therefore be heartened by an upcoming collaboration between the Convention Secretariat and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP): local governance is one of the long-standing pillars of UNDP, being implemented in many of their projects. Closer collaboration between UNDP, the Secretariat and local authorities will go a long way toward furthering the effectiveness of our collective efforts.

As a follow-up to a COP9 decision, Singapore took the lead in February of this year in developing an urban ecological index, which will be discussed at our next meeting on cities and biodiversity to be held in Curitiba in November 2009. I would like to thank Ms. Lena Chan for having made a unique contribution in the development and piloting of the implementation of this index in selected cities. The results of the meeting will be submitted to the Nagoya summit on cities and biodiversity to be held on 24-26 October 2010. I am extremely grateful to Nagoya authorities and Aichi prefecture for their commitment to make the Nagoya city summit the largest-ever gathering on cities and biodiversity. The commitment of the city of Nagoya is also illustrated by the secondment of the city official, Mr Chikara Hombo, to the Secretariat in Montreal for a period of two years to assist in the preparation for this historic event. May I request the delegation of Nagoya city to convey to Mayor Takashi Kawamura my deep gratitude for establishing this unique precedent for the United Nations organization.

It is rewarding to see so many organizations and cities taking action. The campaign for Life of Earth will be won, or lost, at the local level. This is the message I have often conveyed since the launch of the CBD’s Cities and Biodiversity Initiative at a groundbreaking meeting in March 2007, at the initiative of Mayor Richa of Curitiba, whose city is today another proud member of ICLEI and its LAB project. It is a message that bears repeating.

I invite you, as participants in the Urban Nature Forum, to work during these two days and during the ICLEI World Congress to continue strengthening cooperative links between local authorities and the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity. David Suzuki, Canada’s foremost environmental luminary, presciently stated: “The time to address this critical issue is now. The more cities sprawl outward, the more we damage the environment and our health.” With biodiversity continuing to be lost at an unprecedented rate and the Nagoya Biodiversity Summit fast approaching, I urge you all to build on the good work you have done to date and find ways to accelerate progress in the fight to save our biological resources.

Thank you for your kind attention.

