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**International Day for Biological
Diversity – not a day for celebration**

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International Day for Biological Diversity – not a day for celebration

Bonn, 17 May 2010. The United Nations celebrates 22 May of each year as the International Day for Biological Diversity. In addition, the United Nations has declared the year 2010 as International Year of Biodiversity. Thus, this year, the meaning of these resources for development and the fight against poverty will be addressed. The international community had set itself the goals to curb the loss of biodiversity by 2010. And yet it has failed. It has been clear for a long time already: the goal will not be achieved and a discussion about post-2010 goals has been going on already for a long time. Thus, the failure has already been attenuated in the run-up period, so that the next Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, which will take place in October in Japan, can still be a success. The question is: for whom?

From the perspective of biodiversity conservation, the situation looks gloomy. On 10 May, the third global diversity report (*Global Biodiversity Outlook 3*) was published, which underscores the failure to achieve the target. The loss of endangered species continues unabated and some ecosystems are facing so-called “tipping points“. That means that their gradual destruction will have serious, irreversible consequences for nature and human beings.

The human influence is blatantly obvious. Species are dying out because their habitat is being destroyed by agricultural production and urbanisation; they are overused themselves or non-native species introduced by humans displace them. Then there is climate change, which for example threatens many species through temperature and precipitation changes.

The extinction of certain species has a disastrous influence of human life. The use of biodiversity and ecosystem services (e.g. food, drinking water, climate and soil control) form the direct basis of existence of many humans or are mainly used to produce export goods that contribute to economic development; whether in agriculture and forestry, fishing, medicine or in tourism. The life of 1.6 bn human beings is based on forestry products (wood, mushrooms, berries etc.). This is contrasted with an annual deforestation of 13 million hectares per year. Fish is the staple food of more than one billion humans; at the same time, already 80 percent of the fish stocks are fully exploited or overfished. 80 percent of the population of Africa use plants and animals as their principal medical care in traditional medicine.

But not only developing countries are beneficiaries of biodiversity. Industrial countries, which have already used up a large part of their own natural resources, also depend on a worldwide availability of resources. Thus, for example the turnover of the pharmaceutical industry is largely based on genetic resources. An increasing loss of biodiversity means that in future all of these services will be restricted and that humans will be able to react less well to future requirements (e.g. illnesses, climate change), since the pool from which one can draw is becoming smaller.

If we bear in mind the negative consequences of the loss of biodiversity, the question arises why the international community has not managed to curb the loss. If we could add together all values of biodiversity for human development, we would come to the conclusion that the protective efforts are a worthwhile investment. But biodiversity is a public good and its achieve-



ments evade any economic assessment. The loss is accepted as an inevitable side effect of economic activities.

The world economy profits overall from the use of biodiversity, but the negative consequences of the loss are above all felt locally. Especially badly affected are people in developing countries. They are more heavily dependent on natural resources and have hardly any possibilities of escape. They will sink deeper into poverty through the further loss of biodiversity.

To obtain clarity about the actual costs of the loss and provide the political decision-makers with new arguments for the protection of biodiversity, after a meeting of the G-8-environment ministers in Potsdam, a study with the title "*The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity*" (TEEB) was commissioned in 2007. The first results of the study show that the loss of biodiversity only the country alone has caused costs in the amount of 500 billion US \$ in the last ten years and the potentials for use has diminished enormously. Thus, for example the annual lost profits through non-sustainable fishing are currently estimated at 50 billion US \$.

Responsibility for investing in biodiversity lies with the individual states. Almost all (with the exception of Andorra and the USA) have signed the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and thus subscribed to its goals – the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, and the fair sharing of products made from genestocks. But the largest part of the still existing biodiversity is located in developing countries, which are overwhelmed by this task alone. It is indispensable therefore that the industrialised nations support the necessary investments. Development cooperation is required here: it can contribute to ensuring that the increasing loss of biodiversity does not result in ever worsening life conditions for the poor and it can promote the use of the protected resources, e.g. through the promotion of sustainable tourism. Until now, the share of official development cooperation, which is invested in the protection of biodiversity, at three percent, is too small to really slow down the loss of biodiversity. If the new goals are taken seriously, the financing must be clearly increased, possibly also through an internationally coordinated levy on the use of natural resources in order to apply an economic incentive for containing the unfettered consumption of nature.



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