

THE ROLE OF INDIGENOUS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN PROTECTING LIFE ON EARTH

Montreal, 30 October 2009 – Constituting a relatively small portion of the world's 6.3 billion people, indigenous and local communities represent the largest portion of linguistic and cultural diversity on Earth and their traditional lands and waters overwhelmingly contain the greatest remaining reserves of biodiversity. Through the application of traditional knowledge, biodiversity has been protected, maintained and even increased over time. The practice of traditional knowledge nurtures both biological resources and hence genetic diversity.

Over 300 participants will gather in Montreal at the headquarters of Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity on Monday, 2 November to discuss the issue of the maintenance and promotion of traditional knowledge relevant to the management of biological diversity. The meeting is expected, in particular, to discuss and provide views on how traditional knowledge should be addressed in the negotiation of an international regime on access and benefit-sharing, so as to ensure that its use is subject to the prior informed consent of indigenous and local communities and that the latter obtain a fair share of the benefits deriving from the use of traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources.

While next week's discussions focus on the issues of traditional knowledge and the international regime, Ahmed Djoghlaif, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, said: "We must also take the time to consider a forward-looking programme of work on how traditional knowledge may be better used to address the grave problems currently facing humanity, including our unsustainable practices and the ever-rising tide of extinctions."

Indigenous and local communities have accumulated vast stores of biodiversity-related knowledge in their long history of managing the environment. The refined body of knowledge that indigenous and local communities have handed down orally from generation to generation are not only of direct value to these societies but also of considerable value to humankind as a whole. What is being discussed in the contemporary global crisis are major shifts and transformations in economy, politics and environment, in which indigenous and local communities, biological and cultural diversity, can and should make a crucial contribution.

The meeting, being held barely two months before the start of the International Year of Biodiversity, provides a unique opportunity for rethinking and possible reinventing and repositioning the Working Group on traditional knowledge in the post 2010 period to ensure that it plays an important role in helping to save life on Earth, by contributing to the three objectives of the Convention. "I firmly believe that the survival of species and the survival of traditional knowledge and of the holders of this knowledge are inextricably linked," said Ahmed Djoghlaif. "We are at a crossroad in life and a crossroad for the Convention and its partners, in particular, indigenous and local communities. 2010 will be landmark year in the history of the Convention. A post-2010 biodiversity vision and target will be adopted to meet the unprecedented multiple crises facing humanity compounded by climate change. In

doing so we will need to learn and be inspired by the wisdom of our ancestors and the vision of today's guardians of the traditional knowledge of mankind."

Background

The Convention and indigenous and local communities The international community has recognized the close and traditional dependence of many indigenous and local communities

on biological resources, notably in the preamble to the Convention on Biological Diversity. There is also a broad recognition of the contribution that traditional knowledge can make to both the conservation and the sustainable use of biological diversity, two fundamental objectives of the Convention.

The Conference of the Parties has established a working group specifically to address the implementation of Article 8 (j) and related provisions of the Convention, which require Parties to respect, preserve and promote traditional knowledge relevant to conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources. This working group is open to all Parties, and indigenous and local communities representatives play a full and active role in its work. Traditional knowledge affects many aspects of biological diversity, so it will continue to be addressed by the Conference of the Parties and by other working groups as well. In particular, in decision VII/19 D the Conference of the Parties requested the Ad Hoc Working Group on Access and Benefit-sharing with the collaboration of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Article 8 (j) and Related Provisions to elaborate an international regime on access to genetic resources and benefit sharing with the aim of adopting an instrument/instruments to effectively implement the provisions in Article 15 and Article 8 (j) of the Convention and the three objectives of the Convention. This is an ongoing priority of the Convention. For more information please visit the Secretariat's webpages on Article 8(j) www.cbd.int/traditional and on the International Regime on Access and Benefit-Sharing www.cbd.int/abs/regime.shtml

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 192 Parties, the Convention has near-universal participation among countries committed to preserving life on Earth. The Convention 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.

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