



With breaking stories and
newswire products from

UN NEWS CENTRE



Preserving world's biodiversity vital for economic development, UN official warns



11 February 2010 – Saving the world's myriad diverse species, which are being lost to human activity at an unprecedented rate that some experts put at 1,000 times the natural progression, is vital not just for environmental reasons but for the economic well-being of humankind, a senior United Nations official said today.

"Without preserving biodiversity and preserving our natural habitat, the Millennium Development Goals (**MDGs**) just cannot be achieved," UN Development Programme (**UNDP**) Environment and Energy Group Director Veerle Vandeweerd warned, referring to targets set by the 2000 UN summit to slash a host of social ills, from extreme poverty and hunger to maternal and infant mortality to lack of access to education and health care, all by 2015.

Stressing the importance of the UN naming 2010 the International Year of Biodiversity, she cited former Norwegian prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, who in 1993 said that the library of life is on fire. "And 17 years later the library of life, which is our biodiversity, is still on fire," Ms. Vandeweerd told a news briefing in New York.

The reason why UNDP is "so involved in biodiversity and why we think it is so important is indeed because biodiversity is not about greenness, biodiversity is about the economy, and biodiversity is about the life of people at the community level.

"The loss of biodiversity and the degradation of natural resources impact first and foremost the poor and the women and the vulnerable and we should not forget that three quarters of the world's population depend on natural resources for their daily living and their daily

survival, from the food, the shelter, the recreation, everything; three quarters of the world population is directly related to biodiversity on this planet.”

In launching the Year, the UN has stressed that the variety of life on Earth is vital to sustaining the living networks and systems that provide health, wealth, food and fuel.

“Humans are part of nature's rich diversity and have the power to protect or destroy it,” the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which is hosted by the UN Environment Programme (**UNEP**), says in summarizing the Year’s main message, with its focus on raising awareness to generate public pressure for action by the world's decision makers.

The Convention, which opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, entered into force at the end of 1993 and now has 193 Parties, is based on the premise that the world’s diverse ecosystems purify the air and the water that are the basis of life, stabilize and moderate the Earth's climate, renew soil fertility and pollinate plants.

Yet human activity is causing this diversity to be lost irreversibly at a greatly accelerated rate. As an example, Ms. Vandeweerd cited marine species. “In fact, the last frontier of the world lies in the ocean and it’s sad to see that we are destroying our oceans so quickly before we even know which biodiversity is harboured in the ocean,” she said.

“The deep sea biodiversity is something that we are just coming to know, is already being destroyed by all kinds of fishing. We are still discovering new species in the deep sea every single day and before we even discover them we are killing them.”

UNDP is working in two key areas in the field of biodiversity: to unleash the economic potential of protected areas (22 per cent of Earth) to help communities there achieve more sustainable livelihoods; and in the rest of the world to insert biodiversity in the economic sector such as agriculture, forestry, mining and tourism.

“For us there is no doubt that the Year of Biodiversity hopefully should become a year when we pay much more attention to biodiversity and conservation... where the world will pay at least as much attention to biodiversity as to climate change,” she concluded.

News Tracker: past stories on this issue

UN opens Biodiversity Year with plea to save world's ecosystems