

UN report urges action to save Arctic biodiversity



Damage to the Arctic environment will have a serious impact on biodiversity

27 October 2010 – Protecting the biodiversity of the Arctic, home to some of the most rapid environmental changes on the planet, requires addressing a number of threats whose root causes originate outside the region, according to a new United Nations report.

“We are currently witnessing unprecedented change in the Arctic, which will have important and far-reaching consequences not only for the region itself, but for the rest of the world,” Achim Steiner, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (**UNEP**), wrote in the forward of ***Protecting Arctic Biodiversity: Strengths and limitations of environmental agreements***.

“Evidence of a warming Arctic, and its associated consequences, is mounting and this year is no exception,” he said of the world’s largest ecoregion.

Polar bears and other species are losing the sea ice they depend on, while other habitats critical for biodiversity, including tundras, have been disappearing in recent decades due to climate change.

“At the same time, habitat loss and fragmentation from infrastructure and industrial development, pollution and toxins, overharvesting, and invasive species infestations continue to have impacts on biodiversity in the region,” Mr. Steiner writes.

Additionally changes in the abundance and distribution of species, including reindeer and caribou whose populations have dropped by one third since 2000, are threatening traditional ways of life for Arctic peoples.

Among the new publication’s recommendations are enhanced investments in the co-management and support for adaptation programmes, increasing the extent of protected areas in the Arctic, and promoting cooperation with non-Arctic nations sharing responsibility for the area’s migratory wildlife.

The report was launched as the high-level segment of the summit of the conference of parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (**CBD**) kicked off today in Nagoya, Japan.

Mr. Steiner urged governments attending the meeting to agree on policies and financing to save species and the planet. “We all know that an outcome is in the balance,” he said in his

remarks, adding that time is running fast at the conference. "The missing link now really is political will."

In a video **message** to ministers assembled for the meeting, **Secretary-General** Ban Ki-moon noted that the target to reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010 has not been met, calling for a "new vision and new determination."

He stressed that neglecting the decline in biodiversity costs the planet trillions of dollars annually. "We are wasting our natural capital," he said.

For his part, General Assembly President Joseph Deiss, in his message to the gathering, urged the adoption of a strategic plan to successfully guide national, regional and global efforts to protect and promote the sustainable use of biodiversity.

"This is key to ensuring the health, prosperity and security of present and future generations," he said. "Preserving biodiversity is not a luxury; it is a duty."

Mr. Deiss also highlighted the toll of biodiversity loss on the world's poorest. "Many biodiversity-rich areas are in developing countries whose people are particularly dependent on agriculture, fishing and forestry for their subsistence."

After he gave his address, the Assembly President discussed the Millennium Development Goals (**MDGs**), reform of the Security Council and his upcoming visit to Hiroshima with Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan. He commended Mr. Kan for Japan's strong support for the world body.

The Assembly President arrived in Tokyo yesterday, meeting with Takeaki Matsumoto, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and the two men conferred on environmental issues.

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