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Ban spotlights threat of alien species to global ecosystems on International Day



22 May 2009 – The spread of non-native species is harming ecosystems, livelihoods and economies around the world, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today in a [message](#) to mark the International Day for Biological Diversity.

Mr. Ban said the global decline in biodiversity “remains alarming, despite agreement at the (2002) World Summit on Sustainable Development to significantly reduce the rate of loss by 2010,” citing deforestation, habitat changes and land degradation, often linked to climate change's growing impact, as the main drivers of biodiversity loss.

But another threat – and the focus of this year's observance of this year's International Day – is the spread of invasive alien species, he said.

“An unwanted by-product of globalization, non-native species, is harming ecosystem services, livelihoods and economies throughout the world,” the Secretary-General said, adding that the implications for poverty reduction and sustainable development are “profound.”

He pointed to the Government of South Africa, which alone is spending up to \$60 million annually to eradicate plants, such as wattles, which are invading farmland, river systems and economically-important tourist sites such as the Cape Floral Kingdom.

In the Great Lakes of North America, zebra mussels are affecting shipping, fisheries and electric power generation, while in the islands of the Pacific Ocean, rats from foreign ships are wiping out indigenous birds and in many African nations, the water hyacinth is clogging lakes and rivers, he said.

In his message, the Secretary-General highlighted the Convention on Biological Diversity, which is addressing the threat of invasive alien species by setting global priorities and guidelines, sharing information and expertise, and helping to coordinate international action.

“The most cost-effective and feasible method of control is prevention,” Mr. Ban stated, noting that a successful strategy will require collaboration among Governments, economic sectors and non-governmental and international organizations.

“A country can only prevent invasions if it knows which species may invade, where they may come from and the best management options for dealing with them,” he stressed.

Individuals, too, have a responsibility, the Secretary-General said. “Abiding by local and international quarantine and customs regulations will prevent the spread of insect pests, weeds and diseases. A simple rule applies: leave living organisms in their natural habitats and bring home only memories.”

Achim Steiner, Executive Director of UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)) marked the International Day by urging nations to “get tough” on alien species.

“Far too many countries have failed to grasp the threat or are far too casual in their response,” he wrote in an editorial. “This is a mistake of profound environmental and economic proportions.”

Invasive alien species may be causing over \$1.4 trillion – or 5 per cent of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – worth of damage to the worldwide economy and serving as an obstacle to achieving the Millennium Development Goals ([MDGs](#)), eight anti-poverty targets with a 2015 deadline, Mr. Steiner said.

The species “are spread from one continent to another via the global agricultural, horticultural and pet trades or by hitchhiking lifts in ballast water and on ship's hulls,” he pointed out, calling for tougher customs controls and eradication programmes.

UNEP also announced the creation of a [website](#) which provides comprehensive information on global biodiversity indicators and trends, with an emphasis on reporting efforts aimed at slowing biodiversity loss by 2010.

Also marking the day, General Assembly President Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann said that “it is not too late to take individual and collective measures, to respond to biodiversity loss in order to protect and sustain our daily needs and maintain our livelihoods.”

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