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Marking World Environment Day, UN sounds alarm on biodiversity



World Environmental Day, 5 June 2010

4 June 2010 – As millions around the globe celebrate [World Environment Day](#), United Nations officials are warning that the incredible variety of life on Earth is in peril and urging everyone to speak out to protect biodiversity.

Rwanda, which is home to over 50 threatened species, is the global host for this year's celebrations, which will culminate on Saturday with a ceremony at which high-profile figures such as President Paul Kagame and Hollywood actor Don Cheadle will have the honour of naming baby gorillas.

The events in Rwanda are among the thousands that will take place worldwide on 5 June to mark the Day, which this year celebrates the incredible diversity of life on Earth as part of the 2010 International Year of Biodiversity, under the theme "Many Species. One Planet. One Future."

As part of the celebrations, the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)) has launched an updated report and documentary entitled *The Last Stand of the Gorilla*. The report warns that unless urgent action is taken to strengthen the enforcement of environmental law and counter poaching, endangered gorillas may largely disappear from the Greater Congo Basin in the next 15 years.

"From frogs to gorillas, from huge plants to tiny insects, thousands of species are in jeopardy," Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warns in his message for the Day, adding that species are becoming extinct at the fastest rate ever recorded.

He stressed the need to stop this “mass extinction” and raise awareness about the vital importance of the millions of species that inhabit the planet’s soils, forests, oceans, coral reefs and mountains.

“I appeal to everyone – from Kigali to Canberra, from Kuala Lumpur to Quito – to help us sound the alarm. Get involved, speak out. Learn and teach others. Show leadership and help clean up.”

UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner noted in his message that the near invisibility in national accounts of biological diversity and of the economically-important services of ecosystems such as forests and freshwaters is short-changing the planet and its people.

“2010 is a year in which this status quo needs to be firmly and decisively challenged in order to halt the loss of species and catalyse a far more intelligent management of the natural world,” he stated.

“This is a central thrust of the Green Economy, an initiative of UNEP and a response to the multiple challenges, but also multiple opportunities at hand. It is gaining resonance and traction across the globe among world leaders, businesses, citizens and the UN system.”

At the UN, Mr. Ban used the occasion of the Day to publicly call on all UN agencies, funds and programmes to become climate neutral and ‘go green.’ A new website has been developed to improve the UN’s communications on its internal sustainability performance.

‘**Greening the Blue**,’ which was launched on Friday, shows what is happening to make the UN more sustainable and provides advice to staff on how they can contribute. It includes the greenhouse gas inventories of 49 UN organizations, as well as detailed tips and tools for staff in how to reduce their personal carbon footprints.

Other events taking place around the world include tree plantings and beach clean-ups in Africa and environmental film screenings and poetry contests in Europe, as well as the launch of a global campaign to reduce carbon emissions by 10 per cent in a year.

Meanwhile, the Director of the UN Forum on Forests Secretariat, Jan McAlpine, said today that the focus on biodiversity for this year’s celebration of World Environment Day can spur public action to sustain the world’s forests, on which more than 1.6 billion people depend for their livelihoods.

Close to 80 per cent of the world’s terrestrial biodiversity reside in forest habitats, and Ms. McAlpine noted that global recognition on the role of forests is growing. “There is greater awareness of the benefits forests provide in stabilizing climate change, protecting biodiversity and in the livelihoods of billions.”

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