

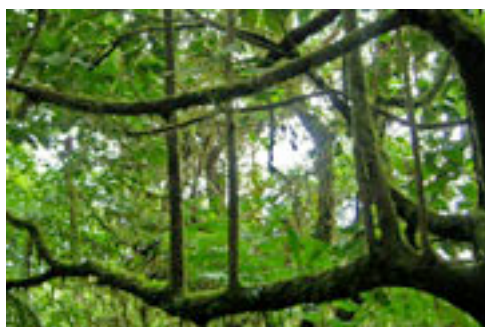


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On biodiversity day, UN highlights social, economic and green benefits of forests



Primary forests account for 36 per cent of forest area

20 May 2011 –

[Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon today voiced concern over alarming deforestation and the degradation of woodlands and urged States to implement the recently agreed international treaty on sharing the benefits of the Earth's genetic resources, including forests and the natural valuables found in them.

“Despite our growing understanding and appreciation of just how much we reap from forests, they are still disappearing at an alarming rate,” said Mr. Ban in a message to mark the [International Day for Biological Diversity](#), which falls on 22 May each year.

Last October, the 193 Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) adopted the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from Their Utilization, a landmark treaty that links conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity with development.

“Forests contain a vast – and barely catalogued – store of biodiversity. The early ratification and implementation of this protocol can support forest protection and the sustainable use of biodiversity. This, in turn, can contribute to poverty alleviation and sustainable national development,” said Mr. Ban.

He drew attention to the fact that this year's observance of the International Day for Biodiversity coincides with the International Year of Forests, declared by the General Assembly to educate the global community about the value of forests and the extreme social, economic and environmental costs of losing them.

"The benefits of forests are far-reaching. Forests catch and store water, stabilize soils, harbour biodiversity and make an important contribution to regulating climate and the greenhouse gases that are causing climate change. This year's International Day for Biological Diversity is devoted to highlighting the need for urgent action."

He noted with appreciation that awareness is growing that stemming deforestation and forest degradation can contribute to reducing the threat of climate change, biodiversity loss and land degradation.

The United Nations Goodwill Ambassador for Biodiversity, acclaimed actor and conservationist Edward Norton, for his part, warned that humanity is wreaking havoc with Earth's capacity to sustain life through destructive exploitation of natural resources and decimation of the planet's biodiversity.

"We are disrupting the natural systems of our planet in ways that will cause havoc for our way of life," Mr. Norton told UN News Centre in an interview.

"The UN is providing a forum for countries big and small to work together on how we can put into policy issues like environmental sustainability, protection of biodiversity, protection of forests, combating desertification," he said.

The Secretary-General pointed out that governments will next year reconvene in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, for UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and called for a recommitment to the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests.

Twenty-two States have signed the Nagoya Protocol, which will enter into force 90 days after ratification by 50 Parties to the CBD. More States expected to sign the protocol at UN Headquarters in September on the sidelines of the 66th session of the General Assembly, according to the secretariat of the convention.

The protocol envisages the setting up of an international regime on access and benefit sharing of genetic resources, which will lay down the basic ground rules on how nations cooperate in obtaining genetic resources.

It outline how benefits – for example, from when a plant's genetics are turned into a commercial product, such as medicine – will be shared with countries and communities which conserved and managed that resource, in some cases for millennia.

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