

UNITED NATIONS



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**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**MESSAGE TO THE HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT  
OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL MEETING  
ON GREAT APES AND THE GREAT APES SURVIVAL PROJECT (GRASP)  
ORGANIZED BY UNEP AND UNESCO  
Kinshasa, 9 September 2005**

The great apes are our close relatives. Like us, they are self-aware. They have tools, medicines, cultures and politics. Not only do they communicate with each other, they can learn to use sign language and have conversations with people.

Sadly, however, we have not treated them with the respect they deserve. Habitat loss, disease, hunting and illegal trade are driving them to the brink of extinction. The total number of great apes in the world is now probably no more than 400,000, where only fifty years ago it was at least 2 million.

In the 23 countries, from West Africa to Borneo, where great apes still survive, their habitat has been largely reduced to isolated forest islands. Only by protecting these remaining forests can we ensure great apes' survival. None of these countries is rich. All are struggling to balance the development aspirations of their people with the need to ensure environmental sustainability.

Yet there are signs of hope. Country by country, conservation measures are under way, often with governments cooperating across national frontiers. Local communities are also showing that they, too, can be enthusiastic conservationists when given the means and the motivation.

Building on these successes will require assistance and encouragement, which is why the Great Apes Survival Project is so important. Only by working together can governments, conservation organizations, businesses and communities mobilize the money, expertise and commitment needed to protect humankind's closest relatives.

The great apes still have a chance, but their fate lies entirely in our hands. This meeting made great progress in charting the way forward. Please accept my congratulations for a job well done.