



# Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR BIODIVERSITY  
PROTECT BIODIVERSITY IN DRYLANDS

**22 May**  
2006



ACHIEVING THE 2010 TARGET!

**MESSAGE OF DR. AHMED DJOHLAF,**  
**THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY,**  
**ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD WATER DAY**  
**22 MARCH 2006**

As Samuel Taylor Coleridge said, “Water, water, everywhere/ Nor any drop to drink.” Fresh water covers less than 0.02 % of the Earth’s surface. Water demand from aquifers is increasing at an unprecedented rate. It is therefore not surprising that four out of every ten people in the world live in countries with a severe shortage of drinking water. In 2025, two thirds of humanity, will experience a similar situation. As a result, 1.1 billion people in the world still do not have access to safe water and 2.4 billion do not have adequate sanitation. Water-related diseases today account for the death of more than 5 million people, including 2 million children under the age of 5 years.

The scarcity of water is compounded not only by the long term impact of climate change but also an increasing impact of pollution. More than half of the world’s major rivers have become seriously depleted and polluted, thus aggravating the degradation and contamination of surrounding ecosystems already seriously affected by land-based human activities.

Water is vital for the survival of human beings and for sustaining life on Earth. It is also home to an extraordinarily high level of biodiversity, which also under serious threat and is experiencing an unprecedented level of extinction. Never in human history has the rate of biodiversity loss been so rapid as in the past 50 years. It is for this reason that, at the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in September 2002, 110 Heads of State and Government committed themselves to substantially reducing the rate of loss of biodiversity by 2010.

The strategic target cannot be achieved without addressing the fourth pillar of sustainable development, namely the cultural dimension, which includes the cultural and spiritual dimensions of water. It is therefore a matter of great satisfaction that this year’s celebration of World Water Day is being held under the theme “Water and Cultures”.

Water is at the heart of the traditional and ancestral belief systems of indigenous and local communities. The spiritual dimensions of water are emphasized in religious beliefs and values of mankind. Considered a sacred gift, water is often seen as the origin of life on Earth and a source of purification. Therefore any effective long-term strategy aimed at promoting the sustainable use of water needs to include its cultural and spiritual dimension. I sincerely hope that this year celebration of World Water Day will make a significant contribution to achieving this strategic objective, which is essential for fulfilling the promise made by the Heads of State and Government of reducing the rate of loss of biodiversity by 2010.



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