

Mayors Conference on Local Action for Biodiversity 26-28 May 2008

Opening address from UNEP

by Mr. Bakary Kante, Director, DELC
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Some Facts

- Over the past 50 years, ecosystems have changed at a more rapid and intense rate than ever before. The **human-induced extinction rate of animal and plant species is 30% higher than the natural rate.**
- Although **cities** occupy just **2%** of the Earth surface, **they house half of the world's population**, while urban **dwellers use 75% of the planet's natural resources.**
- Humans have changed ecosystems faster and more extensively than in any period in human history. This has been due largely to **rapidly growing demands** for food, freshwater, timber, fiber, and fuel. The result has been a substantial and largely irreversible loss in the diversity of life on Earth.
- In addition, in **2007**, for the first time in human history, **more than half of the world population became urban** and 2007 also saw the number of slum dwellers in the world cross the 1 billion mark.
- Urbanization proceeds in a variety of ways in different parts of the world¹ and affects the environment at all scales. In developing countries, where the Millennium Development Goals are a primary target, unchecked and unmanaged urban growth places increased pressures on vulnerable social and ecological systems.
- **Cities** in developing countries will absorb **95% of urban growth** in the next 20 years. By **2030**, **developing cities** will be home to almost 4 billion people, or **80% of the world's population**. This will have major impacts on biodiversity and surrounding ecosystems.

¹ Sub-Saharan Africa already has the highest urban growth rate and the highest slum growth rate in the world: 4.6% and 4.5% respectively, more than twice the world average. In African cities 72% of the population lives in slums and informal settlements and 60% live below the poverty line.

- This degradation of ecosystem services could get significantly worse during the next 50 years. It is a **barrier** to the achievement of the **Millennium Development Goals**.

Cities, ecosystems and biodiversity

- **This meeting will open a new and extremely important path towards our goal to reduce the loss of biodiversity world wide. Cities** are part of ecosystems. They are **managers and users of biodiversity. They depend on ecosystem services.** They impact on ecosystems.
- Indeed, **cities draw on their surrounding ecosystems** for goods and services, and **their products and emissions can affect** regional and even **global ecosystems**.
- Studies of the **ecological footprint of cities** – the area of land needed to provide a city with the resources it requires to function and to remove its waste- show that cities affect a geographical area much greater than their own surface area.
- But while damaged ecosystems negatively affect urban residents, healthy ecosystems provide cities with a range of services which are essential for their economic, social and environmental sustainability.
- **An example:** in **Nairobi**, Kenya, **demand for charcoal threatens the Aberdares forest**, which plays an important role in the city's water catchment and purification system. **The health of the forest's ecosystem is essential if Nairobi's water supply is to be assured.** Biodiversity and Ecosystems is at the heart of the urban/rural linkages.

Cities are the solution

- Biodiversity has become a global concern. The international community has agreed to significantly reduce the loss of biodiversity by 2010, ie the **Global 2010 Biodiversity Target**. This requires immediate and continued conservation measures at global, national, regional and local levels- **with cities playing a crucial role** in securing its protection, management and sustainable use.
- **Cities** play a key role in global efforts to protect and manage vulnerable ecosystems and biodiversity, as they represent the level of government closest to people. **As land-use planners, policy-makers, and developers and managers of local infrastructure, they are in the driving seat to promote sustainable development and its biodiversity components.** They also have a responsibility to raise public awareness about the importance of biodiversity.

- The **Curitiba Mayors' meeting** in March 2007 represented a **breakthrough** in the recognition of cities as essential actors in the preservation and conservation of biodiversity. For the first time, mayors gathered during the CBD and adopted the Curitiba Declaration on Cities and biodiversity which is being conveyed to this COP.
- Whether it is in **Curitiba, Nagoya, Montreal, Johannesburg** and the city of **Bonn** which is warmly welcoming us today, as well as many other cities in the world, they all portray **successful examples on how local authorities can pioneer the biodiversity cause**.
- **Common aspects to successful interventions include the following:** (5 elements):
 - Biodiversity is **integrated** into planning at city level;
 - Functioning **governance structures** are in place and able to enforce legislation;
 - **Involvement of citizens** and especially poor communities is ensured from the start;
 - Cities invest in **education** and **awareness**; and
 - Cities also **cooperate** with other levels of government.
- All these cities experiences also show that actions at the local level can have direct and obvious results that can convince others of the need to get involved, while sending a message to higher levels of governments. Indeed, **urban experiences** in ecosystem conservation and biodiversity protection **can also be useful at the national level** as they help to strengthen national policies and to elaborate **global agendas** that respond to urban needs.

International efforts to support the role of Local Authorities in the protection of biodiversity

- **Several initiatives** have been developed regarding the involvement of local authorities in the global efforts to achieve sustainable development and to reduce the loss of biodiversity.
- **UNEP aims to integrate the urban dimension in its activities** and is working to mainstream the environmental perspective into local, national and global policy-making and incorporate urban perspectives in environmental policy-making at all levels. UNEP is also highlighting the **local-global linkages** of environmental issues, particularly climate change and biodiversity.

- **UNEP** is therefore **supporting** the innovative **Local Action for Biodiversity** project (LAB) of ICLEI which recognizes the importance of local authorities halting the loss of biodiversity in urban areas and of integrating such strategies into overall city planning. This initiative, active in 21 cities, which is developed in partnership with the World Conservation Union (IUCN), Countdown 2010, the South African National Biodiversity Institute and Roma Natura, focuses on enhancing the profile of, and planning and management for, biodiversity at local level.
- A **campaign on cities and biodiversity** is also being developed by UNEP with the Secretariat of the CBD, ICLEI, UN-HABITAT and other key partners. UNEP is participating in a **cities and biodiversity task force** launched by the city of Curitiba and CBD which seeks to increase the involvement of cities in global biodiversity policy-making.
- Part of this work included the production of a booklet-**Viumbe Hai**, by UNEP, ICLEI and UN-HABITAT on **six case studies in Africa** describing how urban managers have found **innovative solutions to the management of their ecosystems** while ensuring that the poor fully benefit from healthy ecosystems for example through employment in tourism and improved health and food security. [Some copies are available; pls feel free to take yours!]
- Finally, **UNEP has just finalized**, together with the active engagement of ICLEI, and other key partners, a **publication with case studies of cities in the world, that are managing biodiversity and ecosystems sustainably**. This publication will be launched on the last day of the Mayors conference, on May 30 at 4:00 during the exhibition on Local Action for Biodiversity which is showcasing pioneering experiences on biodiversity at local level.

The way forward

- **Successful management of urban ecosystems** will ultimately rest on a scientific, social and political capacity to understand and respond to the diverse forces shaping environmental change in time and space.
- We at UNEP, in collaboration with our main partners, suggest establishing a **Global Partnership on Cities and Biodiversity** which will coordinate all existing initiatives and lessons learnt from experience on biodiversity issues, while supporting cities in the sustainable management of biodiversity and increase their political role in the global debate on biodiversity.
- Finally, I would like **to thank the city of Bonn** and the lady Mayor, Mrs. **Barbel Dieckmann**, in particular, for her great engagement and support to the biodiversity cause, which translates itself in the way the whole city of

Bonn is planned and designed. I am sure Bonn will be an inspiring example for cities in the world.

- I would also like to extend my appreciation and sincere thanks to all the distinguished delegates and in particular the **city mayors** present here today, coming from diverse parts of the world who are making every effort to ensure that the voice of local governments is part and parcel of the global debate on biodiversity.
- I wish you every success in your discussions and recommendations to ensure a better tomorrow and the survival of life on Earth!