

Cities and Biodiversity: Achieving the 2010 Biodiversity Target

Curitiba, 26-28 March 2007

Your Excellencies, Your Worships, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to send my greetings to the first ever meeting on cities and biodiversity organized within the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Mayor of Curitiba, His Worship Mr. Beto Richa, and the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Mr. Ahmed Djoghla. They have taken the initiative of gathering Mayors and representatives of so many major cities in Curitiba today to discuss their experiences in the sustainable management and use of biodiversity and ecosystems.

This meeting will open a new and extremely important path towards our goal to reduce the loss of biodiversity world wide. For too long, cities have been ignored by the conservation community. Yet, cities are part of ecosystems. They are managers and users of biodiversity. They depend on ecosystem services. They impact on ecosystems.

Agenda 21 was born in Brazil 15 years ago and in many ways is achieving a new level of maturity via local authorities. Many cities around the world have recognized that ecosystems and biodiversity provide them with social, economic and ecological benefits that are vital for their survival. Local governments are already adopting practices to sustainably manage the ecosystems they depend on.

UNEP and the association of local governments, ICLEI, have collected case studies from six African cities that show how cities reap benefits from biodiversity. Nairobi National Park at the doorsteps of Kenya's capital acts as a carbon sink for the city and brings revenue from tourism. eThekweni municipality (Durban) in South Africa calculated that the environmental services provided by its open space system amount to 400 Million US Dollars each year. Accra's wetlands provide services such as flood control, clean healthy water, and a greenbelt to regulate the micro-climate in the city. I invite you to read the booklet "Viumbe hai. African Cities, Ecosystems and Biodiversity", which will be launched here in Curitiba.

I applaud ICLEI and its members for the Local Action for Biodiversity Project. This is one of the most exciting initiatives bringing action on biodiversity to the urban level. There are other important projects, programmes and campaigns such as IUCN's Countdown 2010 Campaign, activities of the IUCN Cities and Protected Areas Task Force and UNEP's campaign on cities and biodiversity which is being undertaken in cooperation with UN-HABITAT.

Maybe we could bring the existing urban biodiversity activities together under one umbrella to coordinate our work better. A **Global Alliance on Cities and Biodiversity**, focused on specific goals, would allow partners to attract funding for activities and be more efficient. An Alliance would support cities to manage ecosystems and biodiversity and to increase their political role in the global biodiversity agenda.

I am sure that your discussions will be exciting and I regret that I cannot engage with you personally. I look forward to the outcomes of this meeting. I assure you of UNEP's full assistance in implementing the outcomes and presenting them to the next Conference of Parties of the Convention of Biological Diversity in 2008.

The international community has set itself the goal to significantly reduce the loss of biodiversity by 2010 – let's work together to meet this target!