



Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

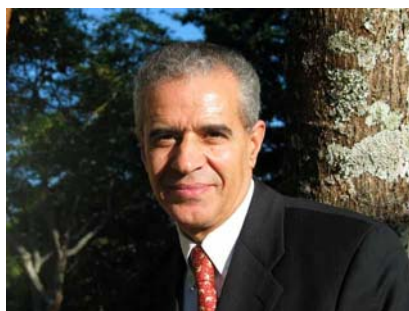
INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR BIODIVERSITY
PROTECT BIODIVERSITY IN DRYLANDS

22 May
2006



ACHIEVING THE 2010 TARGET!

**MESSAGE OF DR. AHMED DJOHLAF,
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY TO THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY,
ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD DAY TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION, 17 JUNE, 2006
THE BEAUTY OF DESERTS – THE CHALLENGE OF DESERTIFICATION**



This year's celebration of the World Day to Combat Desertification is of special significance as it coincides with the celebration of the International Year on Deserts and Desertification. The theme chosen for this year's celebration—the beauty of deserts, the challenge of desertification—is welcomed by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, which has recently celebrated International Biodiversity Day on the same theme in recognition of desert life and the serious threats it faces.

Deserts possess some of the most beautifully unique life on Earth, including the Gemsbok of the Kalahari Desert, which can survive for weeks without drinking water, and the elusive Gobi Bear inhabiting Asia's largest desert. Captured by Edward Abbey, the American author, “the strangeness and wonder of existence are emphasized here, in the desert”.

Deserts also support some of the world's oldest cultures and many of the practices they developed to survive the harshness of desert life remain in use today. Many of these adaptations exemplify the close link between people and biodiversity in deserts. Dromedary camels, for example, have long been the mainstay of Bedouin life, providing transportation, food and a measure of wealth. The San people, who have inhabited the Kalahari for more than 22,000 years have traditionally utilized the Hoodia cactus to stave off hunger and thirst during long hunting trips or times of drought. Through such interactions, desert people have thrived for centuries.

Today, however, deserts are often equated with poverty. Of the two billion people inhabiting dry and sub-humid lands, 90% live in developing countries. Infant mortality rates in developing country drylands are twice as high as in humid areas. The reasons for this disparity are many but desertification plays a key and very central role.



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In addition to exacerbating desert poverty, desertification also threatens biodiversity in deserts. The 2006 Red List of endangered species identified 322 known threatened or endangered species inhabiting deserts and desert oases. Four known desert species are extinct including the Arabian Gazelle and Las Vegas Leopard Frog. An additional four species are extinct in the wild. These trends of extinction are especially disturbing in desert environments where each species plays an important role in maintaining fragile ecosystem functions.

The Convention's programme of work on the biological diversity of dry and sub-humid lands seeks to achieve biodiversity conservation and sustainable use and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of biodiversity resources in dry and sub-humid lands. The programme of work encompasses arid and semi-arid areas, grasslands, savannahs, and Mediterranean landscapes.

The joint work programme on dry and sub-humid lands between the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification acknowledges that biodiversity loss can be both a cause and a consequence of desertification. As such, it is well positioned to support synergistic activities to achieve, within drylands and deserts, both the Millennium Development Goals and the 2010 target of slowing biodiversity loss. The joint work programme seeks to address the multiple and increasing threats to desert life, including climate change, which may amplify the intensity and occurrence of already crippling droughts.

The 122 Ministers and other heads of delegation attending the High level Segment of the eight meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, held in Curitiba, Brazil, on 27-29 March 2006, called for closer collaboration between our two conventions. I would like, on the occasion of this international celebration of desert life, to solemnly pledge my full commitment to spare no effort to enhance the complementarity of our two mutually supportive conventions and the synergy between our two convergent processes.