



Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity



MESSAGE

**FROM THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
DR. AHMED DJOGHLAF
ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD WETLANDS DAY, 02 FEBRUARY 2009**

For information only

World Wetlands Day falls on 2 February every year, the anniversary of the signing of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in 1971. This year's theme - *Upstream-Downstream: Wetlands connect us all* - resonates strongly with the Convention on Biological Diversity and its primary framework for implementation – the ecosystem approach. I recall that at the opening of the latest meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, we heard the song “We are all a part of it”, written especially for the occasion and reflecting this sentiment.

The need to consider wetlands and the biodiversity they support holistically has long been recognized. The role of integrated management of land and water is well reflected in the programmes of work under the Convention on Biological Diversity, on both inland water and marine and coastal ecosystems. Biodiversity in these freshwater and coastal wetlands continues to decline at the fastest rate amongst all the major biomes. In view of the pressures we place upon water, both from over-using water itself and from the impacts of unsustainable land use on water quality, this is hardly surprising. The scenarios for the future are also alarming. More water is needed to meet human development targets for food, drinking water and sanitation, whilst many river basins are already water stressed and a good deal more will soon be so. It is evident that the main impacts of climate change, as reflected through the impacts of environmental changes on people, are on the water cycle. The problems are escalating, becoming more complex to manage and even more urgent. We need to think about how to use ecosystems to help us sustain what we need – adequate and nutritious food, clean water, protection from floods and droughts, sustaining basic sanitation needs and helping us to recycle valuable nutrients and regulate our climate, among others. A healthy and functioning environment, and the biodiversity that underpins this, can no longer be considered a luxury – it is essential to our continued well-being.

Many organizations and stakeholders are working on parts of these challenges. In order to meet them collectively we need to work together even better. Recognizing that everything is interconnected is part of the solution, as is the realization that ultimately we all work on the same thing – balancing what we need from the environment and biodiversity and what it can continue to supply. In no other area is the interconnectedness between what we do, and how nature responds, more apparent than in the relationships between water, land, ecosystem functions, benefits to people and sustainable development. And in no other area is it so important that we get our strategy right.

Two decisions adopted at the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, held in Bonn, from 19 – 30 May 2008, in particular underlined the importance of today's theme. The first one is the recognition of the urgency to improve international cooperation for the upstream-downstream management of water. The second is the reconfirmation that the ecosystem approach remains the right vehicle for moving forward in harmonizing our various response/options to meet the multiple challenges we face.

We have the opportunity to coordinate our actions, together, as we move towards 2010. The International Year of Biodiversity will be celebrated that year. I invite you all to promote and deepen examples of cooperation for the upstream-downstream management of water, and contribute these as examples of the “2010 success stories” for the year. I also invite you to reflect on the ways that we can integrate even better the implementation of Ramsar and the Convention on Biological Diversity at the national level.



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As our excellent partnership with the Ramsar Convention continues to flourish, I have every confidence that the messages delivered today will carry forward to the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity to be held in Nagoya, Japan in 2010. Amongst other important issues for consideration, this meeting will review the progress made with regards to inland waters and consider the opportunities for doing even better beyond 2010. A basis of this, for sure, will be the fact that, after all, everything really is connected through water.

Montreal, 02 February 2009