



**MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE WORLD'S  
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

**9 August 2011**

On the occasion of the International Day of Indigenous Peoples, we pay tribute to the indigenous peoples for their contributions to knowledge, innovations and practices in the conservation of biodiversity on Earth. In its preamble and articles, the Convention on Biological Diversity recognizes the pivotal role of indigenous peoples and local communities and their traditional knowledge in the conservation of life on Earth.

For indigenous peoples, the relationship with biodiversity, which the Quechua and Aymara call Pachamama (Mother Earth) has developed valuable skills that are manifested in the form of stories, songs, art, cultural values, beliefs, rituals, languages, agricultural practices, among others. These cultural expressions, from traditional oral tradition to rich artistic expressions such as singing, dancing, painting, sculpting and carving have taken place over millennia. This traditional knowledge is expressed in a way that preserves biodiversity and its continuation is very important in achieving the objectives of the Convention.

The traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples is related to their customary practices, specifically recognized in Article 10(c) of the Convention on Biological Diversity which stipulates that Parties shall, as far as possible and as appropriate:

*“Protect and encourage customary use of biological resources in accordance with traditional cultural practices that are compatible with conservation or sustainable use requirements.”*

Further to this, the Conference of the Parties has decided to adopt a new major component of work on sustainable use of biodiversity with a focus on customary sustainable use (decision X/43). Indigenous peoples practice customary sustainable use to maintain their cultures, in order to realize their cultural expressions – their arts, musical instruments, foods, medicine, designs, costumes and shelter. Customary use is guided by customary regulations, ethical standards, and targeted sanctions to help promote sustainability. These regulations may include: recognition of mutual respect of nature, avoidance of over-harvesting, protection of sacred species and respect for previous and future generations.

The Kuna Peoples of Panama, for example, in the designs of their molas (traditional clothes) represent their relationship with nature, with their deities and with Napguana (Mother Nature).

The accelerated loss of biodiversity and forests has an impact on the loss of the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples and with it the loss of their culture.

At the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, held in Nagoya in October 2010, the Parties, as an answer to the accelerated loss of biodiversity, decided to adopt the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, including targets very relevant for indigenous peoples and local communities:

**Target 5:** *By 2020, the rate of loss of all natural habitats, including forests, is at least halved and where feasible brought close to zero, and degradation and fragmentation is significantly reduced.*

**Target 14:** *By 2020, ecosystems that provide essential services, including services related to water, and contribute to health, livelihoods and well-being, are restored and safeguarded, taking into account the needs of women, indigenous and local communities, and the poor and vulnerable.*

**Target 18:** *By 2020, the traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and their customary use of biological resources, are respected, subject to national legislation and relevant international obligations, and fully integrated and reflected in the implementation of the Convention with the full and effective participation of indigenous and local communities, at all relevant levels.*

We are in a critical process to reverse the accelerated loss of biodiversity or perish. In this great mission, indigenous peoples are our essential partners in achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets by 2020. There is no doubt that by protecting biodiversity we will ensure good quality of life for everyone in harmony with nature.

We hope, therefore to continue working together, and on behalf of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, I wish indigenous peoples from all over the world a memorable celebration of this International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

Montreal, 8 August 2011