



**MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL
DIVERSITY**

**The Second Forum on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security in the Near East
Region**

27 to 29 June, 2011

As our world continues to face challenges from biodiversity loss, we are increasingly exposed to additional risks from climate change. We know that a warming of 1 – 2°C is expected to decrease agricultural yields in arid, semi-arid and tropical regions, an impact that will affect much of the Near East Region.

In a region such as the Near East, where less than 5% of terrestrial area is classified as cultivable, small changes in climate and losses of biodiversity will have a significant impact on food security. However, adaptation linked to agricultural biodiversity is expected to avoid 10-15% of the projected reductions in yield under changing climatic conditions.

In many cases, it may be possible to use ecosystem-based adaptation in agriculture in order to address negative impacts from climate change while contributing to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

The application of agro-ecological approaches aimed at conserving soil moisture and nutrients, applying integrated pest management and diversifying crops and farming systems through the application of multi-cropping or mixed farming systems can increase long-term resilience against climate change impacts and has many co-benefits such as reducing erosion or eutrophication problems.

Such approaches are supported by the recently adopted new Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011 – 2020. The Strategic Plan demonstrates what can be accomplished in international processes when Parties come together in the spirit of cooperation and compromise to address a common threat. In the case of climate change, agriculture and food security, the Strategic Plan includes

- Aichi Target 7 committing to, by 2020, ensuring that areas under agriculture, aquaculture and forestry are managed sustainably, ensuring conservation of biodiversity,
- Aichi Target 10 committing to, by 2015, minimising the multiple anthropogenic pressures on coral reefs, and other vulnerable ecosystems impacted by climate change or ocean acidification, and
- Aichi Target 15 committing to, by 2020, enhancing ecosystem resilience and the contribution of biodiversity to carbon stocks, through conservation and restoration, including restoration of at least 15% of degraded ecosystems, as a contribution to climate

change mitigation and adaptation and to combating desertification.

By the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, to be held in India in October 2012, many Parties will have made progress on the implementation of these targets and the identification of national indicators to measure success. In doing so, Parties will ensure that the mechanisms are in place for additional threats to food security to be addressed.

Furthermore, if food security is to be ensured in the Near East Region, there is an urgent need to develop crops that are more resilient to drought, heat, and pest infestations. In order to find these genetic keys, scientists explore wild relatives of common crops. Because of this, the maintenance of traditional plant varieties is an important tool in adapting to climate change.

Recently, efforts have been increased to collect and store agricultural and wild plant seeds or develop gene banks in order to protect against loss of genetic variety or against large-scale crises (e.g. Svalbard Global Seed Vault and the Millennium Seed Bank Project (MSBP) of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew). It is anticipated that seeds will have been banked from approximately 10% of the world's wild plant species by the end of the decade, which could allow the reintroduction of those species and the adaptation of genetic resources to address threats to agricultural production from climate change.

The Near East Region is already well positioned to address challenges to food security. Animals raised extensively by pastoralists contribute less per head to climate change and, where traditional varieties are used, tend to be more resilient to the negative impacts of climate change. Communities in the Near East such as the Al-Baggara, Bani Khalid and Al Nuaim, hold a great deal of traditional knowledge that will be invaluable when adjusting to changes in climate. Such communities also contribute significantly to the preservation of agricultural biodiversity by maintaining many traditional varieties of plants and livestock.

You have a great challenge ahead of you, but you have great tools to achieve success. As the Lebanese born author Kahlil Gibran wrote, "Life without love is like a tree without blossoms or fruit." It can also be said that trees without blossoms or fruit are like life without love - we can only hope to avoid such a future.