



MESSAGE

from

Ahmed Djoghlaif, Executive Secretary,

Convention on Biological Diversity

on the occasion of

World Food Day, 16 October 2009 – *Achieving Food Security in Times of Crisis*

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization's annual hunger report, *The State of Food Insecurity*, produced this year in collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP), nearly all of the world's undernourished live in developing countries. In Asia and the Pacific, an estimated 642 million people are suffering from chronic hunger; in Sub-Saharan Africa 265 million; in Latin America and the Caribbean 53 million; in the Near East and North Africa 42 million; and in developed countries 15 million. This means that currently 1.17 billion people are undernourished; in other words, one sixth of humanity is suffering from hunger.

During the second half of the twentieth century, the global food system was able to respond to the doubling of the world population by more than doubling food production whilst also contributing significantly to reducing poverty. However, the rate of growth in agricultural productivity is declining in parallel to the alarming loss of agricultural biodiversity and the increasing reliance of agriculture on a dangerously narrow base of biodiversity.

Over-reliance by farmers on increasing levels of chemical and fossil-fuel inputs to raise productivity has harmed soils and ecosystems and brought diminishing returns. In order to ensure that farms are a sustainable source of food, fibre, and livelihoods, and breeding grounds for biodiversity, as well as sinks for carbon, increased investments in sustainable agriculture are needed, particularly in small-holder farming in developing countries, which has been neglected for the last 30 years.

In brief, sustainable agriculture is a promising way to address biodiversity loss threatened by growing pressures from poor agricultural practices. The amount of irrigated cropland has increased by 70 per cent over the last 40 years. Some of these lands have become too salty for agriculture, resulting in annual losses of approximately 1.5 million hectares of arable land or the equivalent of \$11 billion in lost production. Approximately 40 per cent of global cropland is experiencing some level of erosion, overgrazing or reduction in fertility.

The loss of pollinators is another impact of the continuing loss of biodiversity. One third of the world's crops require pollination to set seeds and fruits. The annual value of this service in the United States is calculated at US\$ 6-8 billion, with the worldwide estimate being US\$ 65-70 billion. It is therefore not surprising that an ongoing global decline in pollinators such as bats and bees has negatively affected agricultural productivity: in one study of 30 crops, estimated harvest loss through lack of pollination was US\$ 54.6 billion, representing a 46 per cent loss of crop yields.



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Life in harmony, into the future

Since agriculture began some 12,000 years ago, approximately 7,000 plant species and several thousand animal species have been used for human food, but the general global trend has been towards diet simplification, with consequent negative impacts on human food security, nutritional balance and health. Today, certain traditional and indigenous communities continue to use 200 or more species in their diets, but in general the genetic diversity of our crops and livestock has been drastically reduced. Seventy-five per cent of the food crop varieties we once grew have disappeared from our fields in the last 100 years. Around 20 per cent of domestic animal breeds are at risk of extinction, with an average of one breed lost each month. Of the 7,000 species of plants that have been domesticated over the history of agriculture, a mere 30 account for 90 per cent of all the food that we eat every day.

Agricultural ecosystems rich in biodiversity provide a diversity of foods that can increase food security and improve nutrition by broadening the food base and diversifying diets. Diverse diets can contribute to the fight against malnutrition, obesity and other health problems in both developing and developed countries. Even within a particular crop, nutrient contents vary significantly between varieties.

Indeed, if we want to avoid the risk of the poor falling deeper into destitution and the hunger-poverty trap, we must make a concerted effort to stem the current economic crisis which comes on the heels of a food crisis that has already strained the coping strategies of the poor.

The International Year of Biodiversity to be celebrated by the international community at all levels including at a high-level meeting during the sixth-fifth session of the United Nations General Assembly to be held in New York in September 2010 with the participation of Heads of State and Government offer a unique opportunity to raise public awareness on the need to engage all stakeholders for protecting life on Earth. Indeed, biodiversity is life and biodiversity is our life.

Montreal, 15 October 2009