



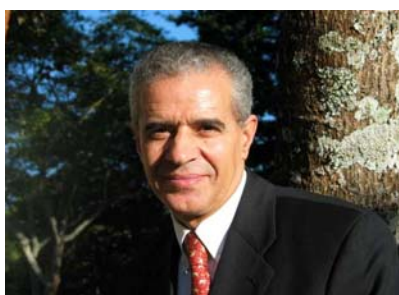
## Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity



Achieving the  
**2010**  
Biodiversity  
Target

### MESSAGE FROM AHMED DJOHLAF EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY ON THE OCCASION OF THE INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM – LIVING WITH DESERTS II LINKAGES BETWEEN DRYLAND SCIENCE AND ON-THE-GROUND PRACTICE

23 August 2006



Antoine de Saint-Exupery, the French writer and aviator, wrote, “What makes a desert beautiful is that somewhere it hides a well.” It is certainly true that deserts, which are often misunderstood to be nothing more than vast barren expanses devoid of life, hide a number of unique and beautiful species and cultures. It is the very uniqueness of life in deserts and other drylands which makes this symposium especially important.

With 90 per cent of the inhabitants of drylands living in developing countries, on-the-ground implementation of drylands science is critical to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. With one out of three of every dryland species that has been assessed classified as threatened, and one of six classified as endangered or critically endangered, it is clear that the need for solid applied science is immediate and urgent.

Drylands science represents an important nexus between biodiversity and livelihoods as many of the inhabitants of drylands base their livelihoods on biodiversity resources. In Senegal, for example, drylands biodiversity provides for more than 50 per cent of rural household incomes. The same is true in North Africa, where at least 40 million people rely on biodiversity resources to maintain their livelihoods. Drylands biodiversity also provides an important source of medication, for example, one third of all plant-based medicines currently used in the United States are derived from drylands species. To further emphasize the global importance of the biodiversity of drylands, many of the most important crops including wheat, barley and olives, originated in drylands.

The biodiversity resources provided by the Earth’s drylands are, however, under severe threat. The recent Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, a four-year endeavour by more than 1,395 experts from 95 countries, revealed that 15 of the 24 ecosystem services studied are in decline. In deserts and other drylands, where the balance of life is so tenuous, this



decline could mean disaster. The recent drought in East Africa illustrated this as 11 million people faced the risk of famine. Even today, as the important issue of drylands science is being discussed, drought and desertification threaten the livelihoods of more than 1 billion people throughout the world.

As the Convention on Biological Diversity enters a new phase of enhanced implementation, efforts to link science to on-the-ground practices are taking on a heightened importance. It is with this in mind that I extend my sincere hope that this symposium, held during the International Year for Deserts and Desertification, will yield real and tangible results.