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Pan European commitment for biodiversity to achieve Millennium Development Goals

MEDIA RELEASE

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‘Biodiversity is the living fabric of this planet,’ and ‘don’t just look at GDP, calculate the GDP of the poor,’ participants could hear at the pan European conference on biodiversity hosted by the Government of Azerbaijan and organized in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme in the historical city of Gabala.

The ‘Gabala Declaration’ adopted today by European Ministers and their representatives, other representatives from governments, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, scientific institutions and the private sector is a clear call for the world’s 192 heads of state to renew and strengthen their commitment to achieve the three objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity at the high level biodiversity event to be held prior to the opening of the UN General Assembly on 22 September 2010.

‘This conference has been a unique opportunity for European decision-makers and opinion formers to highlight the importance of biological diversity in our region’, said Azerbaijan’s Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources, Hussein Bagirov welcoming the over 100 participants this morning.

‘...In the age of serious anthropogenic pressures global, ecological and geological transformations, biological diversity is the most trusted ally for supporting life and wellbeing,’ he added.

‘Combat biodiversity losses will not only benefit to all life on earth, it will also lead to economic growth and the creation of jobs. In other words, it will help achieving the Millennium Development Goals and alleviate poverty’, said Christophe Bouvier, Director, UN Environment Programme, Regional Office for Europe.

Commenting on the economic value of natural resources, Christophe Bouvier added: ‘It is indeed estimated that for an annual investment of US\$45 billion into protected areas alone, the delivery of ecosystem services worth some US\$5 trillion a year could be secured. Protecting biodiversity is the basis of human well-being, yet biodiversity is being threatened by choices that ignore its full nature.’

The deep urgency of saving Nature has been repeated in every speech. Data speaks by itself: since 1970 animal populations have reduced by 30 per cent, the area of mangroves and sea grasses by 20 per cent and the coverage of living corals by 40 per cent. These findings are the first assessment of how the targets made through the 2002 Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) have not been met, and constitute an alarm call to take immediate action on biodiversity. As Mr. Ahmed Djoghla, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity said in his opening statement, ‘Ultimately, the preservation of our biological resources must be mainstreamed into society at large, including our economic systems and markets.’

In the ‘Gabala Declaration’, participants stressed the need for concrete responses to biodiversity loss which must include strategies such as the delivery of viable ecosystem services and the sustainable use of nature (including through the development of appropriate reward and recognition for those who own and manage land), sustainable forest management, eco-tourism, establishment of protected areas, the inclusion of biodiversity criteria in urban and planning policies, building and maintenance of green infrastructures (including coherent, cross boundary ecological networks) and the inclusion of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the curriculum for education.

The Gabala Declaration also highlights the role of regional cooperation in the achievement of a new biodiversity vision and targets as well as the implementation of the CBD strategic plan.

The declaration constitutes the pan European input to the UN General Assembly discussion in September.

Note to the editors:

Please find the complete Declaration here: www.unep.ch/roe

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