

22 May 2003

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Jan Kavan,
President of the 57th Session of the General Assembly,
on the International Day for Biological Diversity**

The United Nations General Assembly assigned the 22 of May of each year as the International Day for Biological Diversity - a day to reflect on the state and the importance of biodiversity. The phenomenon of biodiversity or biological diversity on our planet is one of the wonders that have occupied us intellectually and spiritually over centuries. The preservation of life in all its forms and the sanctity of life have been expressed in many religions and cultures. Our concern about the speed of changing patterns of biodiversity on Earth caused by man's activities had led the United Nations to establish the Convention on Biological Diversity in June 1992. We all know that life itself is diverse and celebrating biological diversity means celebrating life. Therefore protecting biodiversity is in our self-interest and for our self-preservation.

Biodiversity manifests the astonishing complexity of this world and of life on this planet. It represents the variety among living organisms from all sources including atmospheric, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems. But the concept of biodiversity, implies not only the diversity of species, but also diversity within the species and diversity of patterns in the ecosystems, as well as diversity of ecosystems that include deserts, forests, wetlands, mountains, lakes, rivers and agricultural lands. The reason why biodiversity is so important is that diversity creates a stable environment necessary for sustaining life on this planet. The importance of diversity in a permanently changing world has been proven by the evolution of species. Therefore it is no wonder that reproduction of animals and plants is based predominantly on a sexual pattern that promotes diversity rather than a self duplicating non-sexual pattern resulting in a rigid unified form of life which is vulnerable to mass extinction by any single disease or threat. It lends credence to the old truth that diversity and diversification is the best long-term survival strategy of species on this planet.

Man's activities that have led to deforestation of vast areas, or generated atmospheric pollution from industrialization, have similarly created an imbalance of the natural order that is not sustainable if we are to preserve biodiversity and life as we know it today. Poverty alleviation, development and biodiversity are closely interlinked. The loss of biodiversity often has a negative impact on the productivity of ecosystems such as the provision of food, fuel, shelter, building materials, purification of air and water, generation and renewal of soil fertility, pollination of plants and control of pests, to mention a few. Species have been disappearing at 50 to 100 times the natural rate and it is expected that if current trends continue we would lose several thousand plant and animal species in the coming decades. Global warming is changing habitats and the distribution of species. Therefore reasonable environmental protection is necessary wherever biodiversity faces risks created by man.

The goals of the Convention on Biological Diversity are to conserve biodiversity, while allowing sustainable use and sharing of the benefits in an equitable way. Although it has led to adoption of new concepts and policies to protect nature, there is further urgent need for the entire international community to focus creative attention on combating the negative impact of human activities. Each state has to identify and monitor important ecosystems, raise public awareness and social conscience and stay with their commitment to the Millennium Goals regarding sustainable development because as an African indigenous proverb says: "We do not inherit the Earth from our Ancestors, we borrow it from our children."