

Message from the Finnish EU Presidency

By Ms. Paula Lehtomäki, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development, Finland



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Biodiversity is essential to the quality of human well-being. It is a crucial element to sustain the social, economic and spiritual life of all people. But the rural poor often suffer most from the effects of environmental degradation, as they depend directly on natural resources for their livelihoods, and they often have little opportunity to adapt.

In low-income countries, 25% of the total wealth generated is directly linked to resources provided by the environment. Yet, the findings of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment in 2005 and of the Global Biodiversity Outlook in 2006 highlight that most ecosystems, the services they render and the biodiversity they support, are being eroded. For example, over 99% of incidences of unsafe water occur in developing countries, leading to higher risks of disease and premature deaths.

An unprecedented effort is needed from global leaders to act to stop these trends worldwide. This is not only a moral obligation to honour the commitments made but it is a prerequisite for sustained economic growth and development.

Meeting the concerns

The first cornerstone for the global recognition of the irreplaceable value of the environment was set during the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Since then, the commitments to achieve sustainable development and give due consideration to the environment and social aspects of development have been reiterated persistently.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Millennium Declaration to end world poverty by 2015 emphasize that sustainable management of resources is a pre-requisite for achieving sustainable development and alleviate poverty across the planet. At the 2005 World Summit, States reaffirmed the commitment to “eradicate poverty and promote sustainable development and global prosperity

for all”. In April 2006, OECD Development and Environment Ministers adopted a “Framework for Common Action Around Shared Goals”, which underlines the close links between the achievement of the MDGs and the sound management of the environment at local, national and global levels. The United Nations Secretary-General’s recommendation to include the global 2010 biodiversity target under the MDGs is the latest sign from global leaders that biodiversity must be considered a fundamental element to human well-being.

There can be no doubt that there is a solid foundation for moving to act.

Committed through action

At global level, the EU and individual Member States are Parties to a wide range of multilateral environmental agreements and within the EU, policies and strategies are continuously improved to take account of new knowledge about the causal relationships between the environment and economic development. The Commission Communication “Halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010 – and beyond” addresses present concerns about the state of biodiversity in the EU and globally. It outlines an Action Plan for the EU and Member States (MS) to achieve better integration of biodiversity concerns in EU policies and practices and when dealing with global partners. And the key word is implementation.

The many tools already developed to insure a better integration of biodiversity considerations into development policy should be put into practice. This includes, inter alia, a more rigorous application of Regional and Country Environmental Profiles (REPs/CEPs) and follow-up within projects to ensure that the recommendations they outline are implemented. It also entails incorporating implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and other Multilateral Environmental Agreements into development strategies – at EU level, Member State level and in partner countries. For example,

biodiversity should be set explicitly as a priority in the objectives of development cooperation agencies.

To ensure a more holistic approach to development, instruments such as Environmental and Strategic Impact Assessments need to be recognised as serious tools to assess potential risks to the environment and human well-being, as well as to identify benefits from development projects and strategies. For the EU, this entails carrying out a critical review of the potential negative impacts on biodiversity from projects that do not specifically target biodiversity or the environment, financed under, for example, the European Development Fund, and the pre-accession and neighbourhood instruments.

Acting in partnership

Ultimately, the mainstreaming of the environment and biodiversity concerns into development policies and practices depends on the participation of both developed and developing countries. It relies on an understanding of a global responsibility, and the limit to natural resources. To achieve this, there is a need to enhance international cooperation of global issues such as, for example, ocean resources. Bilateral and multilateral donors should also strive to support better governance and strengthen capacities within partner countries. Furthermore, any effective Poverty Reduction Strategy needs to consider steps to empower poor people, ensuring an equitable interest in land, water, biodiversity and ecosystem services, through appropriate legislation and policies.

While national initiatives within partner countries are critical to support the dual goal of promoting development and sustaining the environment, EU development and economic cooperation still have a central role in ensuring mutual coherence with respect to these goals.

The EU Presidencies leading up to the landmark year 2010 are in a key position to stress the importance of the 2010 biodiversity goal and to take action. In this respect, Finland strongly supports the Countdown 2010 initiative. This unique alliance allows individual participants to set clear, realistic goals for actions aimed at honouring commitments towards biodiversity. The Countdown 2010 offers a platform to share information and experience and provides a framework for action, not only within the EU but globally.

Already under the Irish Presidency in early 2004, focus was placed on the biodiversity goal through a large stakeholder conference in Malahide, which provided significant input to the Biodiversity Communication and the Action Plan to 2010 and Beyond.

The United Kingdom carried out a critical review of its actions to honour its commitments to biodiversity and as a response, amongst other things, launched a specific Countdown 2010 Biodiversity Action Fund. In March 2006, The Austrian Federal Forests Enterprise joined the Countdown 2010 initiative by adopting an ambitious 5-year Biodiversity Programme.

Finland will strive to create further precedence through its support to Countdown 2010 by, inter alia, supporting the mainstreaming of biodiversity in development cooperation, and Germany is ready to take on the baton and move forwards with initiatives to support the 2010 goal during 2007.



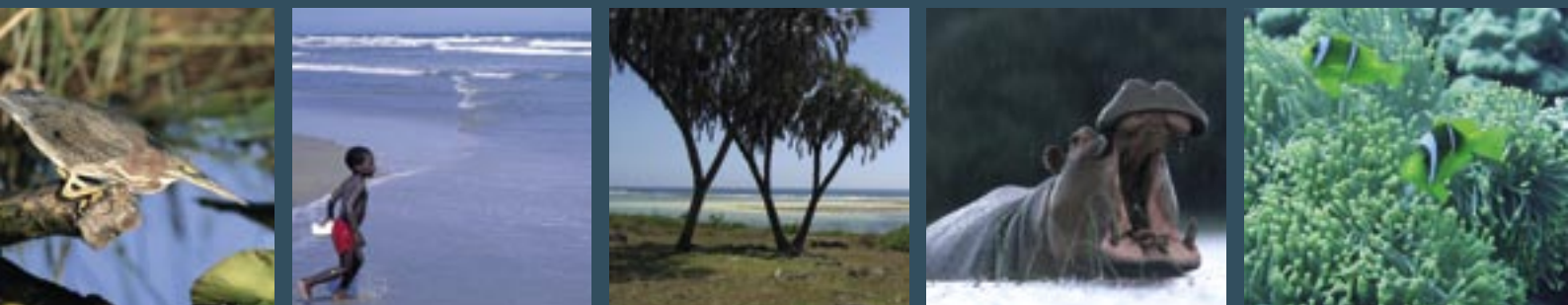


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