
Statement by Ahmed Djoghlaif, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Asia is known for its great variety of marine and coastal biodiversity resources. Southeast Asia is a global centre of marine biodiversity, supporting 30 per cent of the world's coral reefs and mangroves. Marine and coastal ecosystems have played a central role in its socioeconomic development, and as a result Asia has become a major world producer of fish and fisheries products supplying markets with almost 50 per cent of the world's total fish catch from capture fisheries and about 90 per cent of global aquaculture production. FAO has estimated that in 2004 Asia accounted for 87 per cent of the number of persons engaged in fisheries and aquaculture production world-wide.

These impressive figures, however, are overshadowed by the grave concerns that most fisheries in this region are showing signs of overexploitation and severe degradation. The abundance of large, valuable predator species has declined significantly, while smaller species lower down the food chain have become increasingly abundant. Surveys also show considerable degradation and overfishing of coastal stocks, revealing a decline of 6 to 33 per cent of their original value over the past 25 years. The message is alarming. We have to face the harsh reality: there are virtually no new unexploited fish stocks or areas within reach of the fishing fleets of the region.

Moreover, pressure from overfishing and destructive fishing practices is exacerbated by the rapid coastal development, which is linked to the impressive economic growth of this region. The loss of important coastal and marine habitats, pollution, harmful algal blooms, and sedimentation are the consequence. For example, the region lost 70 per cent of its mangrove cover and 20 to 60 per cent of its seagrass beds

in the past 70 years; 64 per cent of coral reefs are reported to be at risk from overfishing alone.

The worrying fact is that we now observe the warning signs for the collapse of marine biodiversity at the global level, not only in Asia. Anthropogenic global climate change, which has profound implications for the survival and productivity of marine populations, communities and ecosystems, adds a new dimension of threats to the conservation of marine biodiversity. An international group of ecologists and economists predicted, in *Science* magazine in November 2006, that the world would run out of seafood by 2048 if the alarming declines in marine species continue at current rates. A global literature review, conducted by the Australian Government in 2006, revealed that substantial impacts of global climate change on marine life are already apparent, and that recent warming of tropical waters has led to repeated mass coral bleaching events on the Great Barrier Reef and elsewhere. A 1-2°C warming of sea water will lead to annual bleaching and regular large-scale mortality events. Knowing that globally coral reefs alone are estimated to house as many as one million species, the devastating impacts of climate change, which are cascading through the food web and leading to the loss of marine biodiversity, may far exceed our imagination. Likewise, in its latest assessment report presented in Bangkok a few days ago on 4 May, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) emphasized that coasts are projected to be exposed to increasing risks, including increased coastal erosion, more extensive coastal flooding, higher storm-surge flooding, coral bleaching, etc., due to climate change and sea-level rise, and that the effect will be exacerbated by increasing human-induced pressures on coastal areas. Many millions of people are projected to be affected by floods every

year with the largest in the mega-deltas of Asia and Africa, while small islands are especially vulnerable.

Small-scale fishing communities are the most vulnerable and severely threatened section of society, facing exceedingly high risks from the environmental degradation of marine and coastal systems and its socio-economic consequences. The collapse of fishery resources goes along with failures in the functioning of marine and coastal ecosystems at different scales. It will eventually have devastating effects on the lives of coastal communities.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is the first global agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of biological resources. It recognizes that the conservation of biological diversity is a common concern of humankind and an integral part of the development process. In particular, it gives special emphasis to respecting, preserving and maintaining the knowledge and traditional practices of indigenous and local communities, including small-scale and artisanal fishing communities.

The issue of climate-change mitigation and adaptation was first linked to the programme of work on marine and coastal biodiversity at the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, in 1998, in response to concerns about the mass coral-bleaching events that had occurred in various parts of the world in 1997/98. The Conference of the Parties also recognized that integrated marine and coastal area management (IMCAM) provides an overarching management framework for addressing cross-sectoral issues related to marine and coastal biodiversity conservation, including threats to sustainable fisheries, and incorporated IMCAM as key element of the elaborated programme of work on marine and coastal biological diversity (decision VII/5). IMCAM enhances the application of ecosystem approach, the establishment of marine protected areas, and planning of proper coastal land and watershed use, which were also identified as useful approaches and tools to address threats to sustainable ocean development in the Plan of

Implementation of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development.

At the Summit, countries also committed themselves to the establishment of representative marine protected areas networks by 2012. This target is also reflected in the elaborated programme of work on marine and coastal biodiversity under the Convention, adopted in 2004 through decision VII/5. Furthermore, in 2006 the Conference of the Parties highlighted the responsibility of, and the role to be played by, indigenous and local communities in promoting the sustainable use of marine resources (decision VIII/22) as well as their potential contribution to advancing progress on the targets, addressing challenges and obstacles, and meeting capacity-building needs related to the implementation of programme of work on protected areas (decision VIII/24).

To achieve a more effective and coherent implementation of the three objectives of the Convention, Parties to the Convention committed themselves to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national levels as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on Earth. This target was later endorsed by the World Summit on Sustainable Development and forms now part of the Millennium Development Goals.

I am glad to observe from the third national reports submitted by Parties under the Convention that substantial efforts have been devoted to achieving the 2010 biodiversity target, including institutional strengthening for integrated marine and coastal area management, the establishment of new marine protected areas, and building national and local capacities for the wise and sustainable management of marine and coastal biodiversity. However, the reports also reveal various challenges and shortcomings, including limited political support and public awareness, limited stakeholder participation and limited integration of biodiversity agenda into socioeconomic development planning.

Small-scale fishing communities need to be enabled to participate in the planning and implementation of fisheries resources management. They need to understand the rights,

roles and responsibilities of fishing communities within the overall framework of integrated management and conservation of marine biodiversity resources.

I am delighted that the present symposium is addressing these critical challenges and barriers. I believe that the discussions and deliberations will make a concrete contribution to our ability to achieve the 2010 biodiversity target, by recognizing the important contribution of small-scale fishing communities in the sustainable management and conservation of coastal and marine resources.

Before I close my statement, I would like to take this opportunity to invite all of you to join hands with other global partners and stakeholders in celebrating International Day for Biological Diversity (IBD) 2007, which is being organized on the theme of "Climate Change and Biological Diversity". As you can see, this year's theme coincides with the fact that 2007 is the International Polar Year.

Now, let me conclude my statement by expressing my warm congratulations and sincere appreciation to the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers and the Royal Government of Cambodia for organizing and hosting this important event in this beautiful, historic city of Siem Reap.

I wish the symposium a great success. Thank you for your attention. ♣