

**April 2002**

**"Biodiversity is not for sale, but nor is it for free. It is priceless"**

### **NGO Statement to CBD/COP6**

**Statement presented to the opening plenary of CBD/COP6 by Patrick Mulvany of ITDG on behalf of Civil Society Organisations present at the 6th Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity, The Hague, 8 April 2002.**

Mr President, distinguished delegates,

We have been asked to make this statement by many of the Civil Society Organisations here present at the sixth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Ten years ago we stood on the Summit of Rio with high hopes of arresting the decline of diversity and defending the global genetic commons for present and future generations. The Convention was born with a determination to conserve and sustainably use biological diversity and fairly and equitably share all types of benefits from its sustainable use. The pre-eminence of environment over trade, industrial and commercial use was established.

Civil Society recognises several strong innovative areas of progress of the Convention on Biological Diversity:

- The Convention has effectively incubated and negotiated the legally-binding Biosafety Protocol -this will be a major success if another 36 countries can proceed quickly to ratify it and it comes into force.
- The National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan process offers much potential to domesticate the Convention on the ground - if countries deliberately and democratically involve all custodians and users of biodiversity, both in the development of these processes as well as the deliberations of the Convention itself.
- The Programmes of work both thematic and cross-cutting are a good start - if they can now move to full implementation.

At the same time we remind you that diversity - in terms of biological resources, production systems, habitats, languages, cultures, means of governance is still eroding rapidly. The people on whom biodiversity depends and who depend on biodiversity for their livelihoods - indigenous peoples, forest dwellers, smallholder farmers, pastoralists, artisanal fisherfolk, were marginalized, are marginalized and will continue to be marginalized from this global and many national processes unless you take deliberate steps to include their perspectives and aspirations and put a halt to the enclosure of the global genetic commons.

We urge the Conference of the Parties to assert the vital importance of biodiversity and the Convention' responsibilities for protecting this biodiversity to the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Biodiversity is the foundation of life, is life, and sustainable development can only proceed with the equitable protection and sharing of biodiversity.

We support a Strategic Plan that will give vision and overall guidance for effective implementation of the Convention. It should be short, concise and forward-looking. The target should be to bring biodiversity loss to a halt by 2010. Activities should be prioritised that contribute most to achieving this target.

We cannot wait another ten years. The Convention is moving forward to outpace the loss of biodiversity but neither fast nor efficiently. It took 8 years, for example, to get forests on the agenda of the Convention, yet forests represent more than half of known species diversity. Here, as elsewhere, we must move much faster. We must develop a proper forest definition that excludes large-scale monoculture tree plantations and move to action-oriented time-bound action to stop conversion of natural forests and illegal exploitation of forest products. We must grapple with underlying causes of loss, not excuses.

Corporate-led globalisation and the economic models imposed by it form a fundamental underlying cause of biodiversity loss. The WTO is arguably the main driving force imposing this economic model of corporate control upon countries. We are particularly concerned that the

results of the WTO Ministerial meeting in Doha will undermine the implementation of the CBD in numerous ways. We urge CBD delegates to stand up to this challenge and protect their Convention against the WTO and other forms of corporate-led globalisation.

Access and benefit sharing laws must protect the customary rights over biological resources and traditional living knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, as well as Farmer's Rights. These rights should include the right to denial of access when prior informed consent is sought. By its very nature, patenting of genetic resources, meaning privatisation of genetic resources and monopolization of their use will lead to restriction of use rather than facilitation of access, as the CBD requires. We call upon parties to the Convention to make a clear statement against Patents on Life.

Finally, if we are serious about diversity, we ask that this COP take a tough and clear stance on the spread of GM crops and genetic pollution, especially of Centres of Diversity, including a ban on Terminator technologies, and to reassert the Precautionary Principle with respect to the use of new technologies. In this respect, we strongly alert governments to the increasing risks of biological warfare.

Mr President, we welcome the Dutch government's hosting of this conference. The Netherlands faces tremendous challenges in terms of protecting its last biodiversity and we urge the Dutch government in this light to protect its most important wetland, the Waddensee, from the devastating impacts of ongoing shellfisheries.

Distinguished delegates, biodiversity is not for sale, but nor is it for free. It is priceless.

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This statement was presented at the opening plenary of COP6 by ITDG on behalf of NGOs, as agreed at the [COP6 NGO Strategy meeting](#) held on Monday 8th April 2002.

The [Sixth Conference of the Parties \(and 10th anniversary\) of the Convention on Biological Diversity](#) in the Hague from 8-19 April and during this time will focus on the following issues:

- forest biological diversity;
- invasive alien species that threaten ecosystems,
- habitats or species;
- access and benefit-sharing as related to genetic resources.

Read more about these issues in the [Global Commons](#) section of this website, or see our pages on [CBD/COP6](#).

**Further information:**

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