

Invest Now or Pay More for Biodiversity Losses Later, say World's Leading Environmental Groups

Title

Hyderabad, India (Oct. 10th, 2012) – World leaders gathering in India this week at the UN's biodiversity summit must commit to a substantial increase in public funds for countries to successfully implement by the end of the decade a global action plan aimed at halting species extinction and protecting the ecosystem services that provide a foundation for sustainable development and human well-being, said the world's leading environmental organisations today. At the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Conservation International (CI), BirdLife International and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) are calling for an annual increase of 20 percent in the international aid given by developed countries to developing nations, from US\$40 billion to US\$99 billion, which represents an average of around US\$12 billion per year between now and 2020.

They call on all countries to commit to an annual increase of 10 percent in national budgets for protecting biodiversity, from US\$205 billion to US\$382 billion by the end of the decade, or a yearly average of around US\$48 billion. Lina Barrera, Director of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Policy at Conservation International, said: "This is a modest investment to conserve nature if you look at the trillions of dollars of benefits we currently derive from biodiversity and the higher cost we will have to pay later if we fail to protect it now. This investment will ensure not only the health of the environment, but also contribute to the long-term health of the global economy, sustainable development and poverty alleviation." At the CBD held in Japan two years ago, almost 200 countries agreed on a 20-target plan to prevent the extinction of threatened animals and plants, and conserve as well as sustainably use habitats by 2020. This time, one of the key issues of the negotiations happening in Hyderabad over the next two weeks will be financing those targets.

To support the implementation of the targets and raise awareness about the urgent need to protect biodiversity, the UN declared 2010-2020 the "Decade of Biodiversity". The current annual funding from public sources to safeguard biodiversity is estimated at around US\$5 billion a year, but recent assessments indicate that several hundreds of billions of dollars per year may be necessary to fully implement the activities in the so-called "Aichi Biodiversity

Targets” by 2020. Activities include, for instance, creating new protected areas, halting overfishing, ensuring sustainable agriculture and forestry, and including the value of biodiversity into poverty alleviation plans. Andrew Deutz, Director International Governmental Relations at The Nature Conservancy, said: “Even without precise figures on the amount of money necessary to successfully implement the future targets, we already know enough to be certain that much more needs to be done to meet even the current need for resources for biodiversity. We are proposing a feasible first step in that direction.”

Biodiversity, or biological diversity, is the total sum of all forms of life on Earth, from genetic material to species and entire ecosystems, in addition to the relationships among those different pieces of the whole. Biodiversity underpins functioning natural habitats -- like forests, deserts or coral reefs -- which provide food, water, medicines and a host of cultural and spiritual values that allow people to survive and prosper economically. “Biodiversity can be described as the fabric of life. When one thread is lost, the entire fabric starts to fall apart,” said Barrera. Carolina Hazin, Global Biodiversity Policy Coordinator at BirdLife International, concluded: “The total sums may sound large but much could be achieved through redirecting current investments. Reforming perverse and harmful subsidies such as those that stimulate overfishing, deforestation, destructive agricultural practices and the use of fossil fuels, could contribute significantly to the sustainable use of natural resources and halting biodiversity loss.” Failure to protect biodiversity could generate trillions of dollars per year in losses in ecosystem services, such as pollination, flood control, water filtration and ecotourism. At the same time, science shows that we are currently living the greatest extinction crisis since dinosaurs roamed on Earth over 65 million years ago. It is estimated that extinction rates are 100-1,000 times faster than the historical average from fossil records, with potentially one species disappearing forever every 20 minutes.