

Global meet to save biodiversity kicks off

The earth is losing four species every hour. The rate of biodiversity loss is now 1,000 times the natural rate. It is in this backdrop that over 5,000 delegates from 191 countries gathered here Monday for the annual conference of the UN's Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

The UN body, which meets here for a 12-day conference till May 30, was set up in the wake of the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit with three objectives - conserving biological diversity, promoting its sustainable use and sharing the benefits arising out of the utilisation of genetic resources fairly and equitably.

There has been some progress on the first objective, with protected area around the world doubling since the CBD was started in 1993. The second and third remain areas of bitter contention between industrialised and developing countries.

Developing countries that have conserved most of the world's biodiversity since the start of the industrial revolution feel their people must derive the benefit of doing so when firms from industrialised countries use them commercially. The firms feel they must patent the products to recover their research and development costs and make profit. The tussle has been well documented around basmati rice varieties or uses of neem.

Delegates at annual CBD conferences have been grappling unsuccessfully with this and will take another stab at a solution here.

But CBD Executive Secretary Ahmed Djoghlaf prefers to look at the positives, the over-100,000 protected areas on the planet. 'Protected areas spanning 19 million square kilometres, covering an area the size of India and China combined, are truly an accomplishment to slow down the asset-stripping of the planet's natural capital,' he said here Monday.

'Protected areas are not simply pretty patches cut off from the rest of the world for future use. They are actively managed natural spaces that provide invaluable services to humanity daily and represent 11.6 percent of the earth's land surface.'

Djoghlaf said: 'By altering the land and ocean a little more each day to satisfy our daily needs and wants, we destroy the very resources that maintain our lives. Protected areas force us to limit the process of overdraw on our natural capital.'

He expected the delegates at the CBD conference to 'optimise the efficiency of at least 30 percent of the protected areas in each country by 2010 - to start making a dent in the losses that we have been imposing on the natural world'.

Djoghlaf warned: 'Only two years are left to reach the 2010 biodiversity target - a commitment made by heads of state and governments in 2002 to significantly reduce the rate of biodiversity loss that is now up to 1,000 times greater than the natural rate. The survival of the millions of species stands at a pivotal point.'

Calling upon the delegates to act now, he said: 'Every moment we lose another species is imperilled. Later is too late. Extinction is forever.'

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