

Ceremony launches the International Year of Biodiversity 2010

Federal Environment Minister Röttgen: loss of habitats and species must be stopped

Today Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel, Federal Environment Minister Norbert Röttgen, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme Achim Steiner and other prominent guests launched the International Year of Biodiversity at the Berlin Museum of Natural History. At the event, Environment Minister Röttgen warned: "Nature conservation is not a luxury. Nature gives us food, clean water and medicines. Insects secure our harvests by pollinating fruit and vegetable crops. Forests protect us from flooding and store large quantities of carbon dioxide, thus countering climate change. If we continue to destroy nature, we will ultimately destroy our own livelihoods and economic base".

The United Nations General Assembly declared 2010 the International Year of Biodiversity. This will raise political and public awareness for the importance of biological diversity and the impacts of its loss -also on human well-being and global economic development. As current holder of the Presidency of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Germany organised this opening event to mark the global launch of the International Year of Biodiversity.

Biological diversity continues to disappear worldwide at an unprecedented rate. Every year 13 million hectares of forest are destroyed - equivalent to an area the size of Greece. 80% of Caribbean coral reefs have already been destroyed (TEEB - The Economics of Biodiversity and Ecosystems 2008) and 35% of mangroves have been wiped out within the past 20 years. Germany's native flora and fauna is also badly off: the 2009 Red List indicates that 72% of all habitats are vulnerable or even critically endangered. 35% of Germany's native animals and 26% of its plant species are endangered.

"This is why we must do everything possible both nationally and internationally to stop the loss of habitats and species. In Germany we have achieved a number of successes in recent years, largely due to meeting our obligations under the Natura 2000 directives. Nevertheless, substantial further efforts are needed, especially in the fields of agriculture, fishery, land sealing and transport, which still represent a major threat to biological diversity," said Federal Environment Minister Röttgen. He announced that a Federal Biological Diversity Programme would be set up to implement the National Strategy on Biodiversity which was adopted during the previous legislative period. "A strategy for the conservation of nature is important and we are now taking concrete steps to implement this," he added.

Since the 9th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD in Bonn in May 2008, the German CBD Presidency has injected momentum into the international debate on nature conservation. For instance, negotiations on an agreement to combat biopiracy, and those on setting up an international nature conservation council have made considerable progress. The German Presidency aims to bring both processes to a successful conclusion before the end of 2010. In 2009, Germany also invested 250 million euro in the conservation of forests and other ecosystems throughout the world. This is to be further developed in future.

This year the international community will not only review how far we have come towards achieving the global 2010 target of a significant reduction of the current rate of global biodiversity loss, but will also decide what targets should be set for international nature conservation policy in the years to come. Germany vigorously supports an ambitious and convincing global target for post-2010 biodiversity policy.

"Political decision-makers worldwide are increasingly recognising that biodiversity protection is also immensely important for human well-being, global economic development and combating poverty. The time has now come to ensure that these insights are followed by deeds", Federal Environment Minister Röttgen stated in Berlin.

Following the celebration, Federal Environment Minister Norbert Röttgen opened the exhibition in Berlin's Museum of Natural History "Ohne Vielfalt der Nature, keine Vielfalt der Wirtschaft" (no business diversity without biodiversity). This exhibition is part of the Business and Biodiversity Initiative which was launched by the Federal Environment Ministry in 2007, with the aim of actively involving the business sector in the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. (www.business-and-biodiversity.de). The exhibition will be shown in the Museum until 18 January, after which it will tour the participating companies and finally go on show in October at the 10th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD in Japan.