

2010 has been declared the International Year of Biodiversity by the UN. One of the environmental priorities of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union will be to ensure the success of negotiations at the 10th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Nagoya (Japan) in October 2010.

The loss of biological diversity is accelerating at an unprecedented rate. With current global species extinction estimated to be occurring at between 50 and 1,000 times the natural rate. The main causes are man-made habitat changes (intensive production systems, construction and mining), invasive exotic species, over-exploitation, pollution and climate change.

The International Year of Biodiversity

2010 has been declared the International Year of Biodiversity by the United Nations and offers an unprecedented opportunity to raise the profile of biodiversity and boost awareness of the urgent need to curb the loss of biodiversity. On 22 September 2010, heads of government will attend the first ever high-level meeting on biodiversity at a special session of the 65th UN General Assembly. This will offer an opportunity to give biodiversity the political attention it deserves on the international scene.

At European level, the Belgian Presidency will also strive to draw attention to biodiversity, which is one of its four top environmental themes. On 8 and 9 September 2010, the Flemish Region will host a European conference entitled Biodiversity post-2010 - Biodiversity in a changing world.

UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

The UN Convention on Biological Diversity was opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 and entered into force on 29 December 1993. There are 193 Parties to the Convention, which has three main objectives:

- The conservation of biological diversity;
- the sustainable use of its components;
- the fair and equitable sharing of benefits derived from the use of genetic resources.

Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP CBD)

The 10th COP CBD, to be held in Nagoya (Japan) in October 2010, will be one of the most important multilateral events held during the Belgian Presidency. It will be preceded by a meeting of the Parties to the

Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB), which addresses the problems of genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

The post-2010 biodiversity objective

In April 2002, the 6th COP CBD undertook "to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on Earth". This undertaking was integrated into the Millennium Development Goals and a strategic plan adopted to fulfil it. Despite significant progress made in preserving and restoring biodiversity, recent evaluations show that the objective set for 2010 has not been achieved. In October 2010, the COP will adopt a new, revised and updated Strategic Plan for the CBD, which will include fresh targets for reducing biodiversity loss between 2011 and 2020.

Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)

Discussions aimed at setting up an international platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services continued at three meetings of international experts held between 2008 and 2010. The objective is to create an interface that enables political decision-makers to draw on scientific knowledge, giving biodiversity a global body comparable to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

The third and final meeting on IPBES, held in Busan (Republic of Korea) from 7 to 11 June 2010, was a success. Under the aegis of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), with the exception of Cuba and Nicaragua, which voiced objections, the delegates approved the creation of an IPBES. This decision in principle will be ratified by the 65th session of the UN General Assembly.

Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS) from the use of genetic resources

To ensure that the third objective of the CBD is implemented, the Johannesburg Summit in 2002 decided to launch negotiations on an international scheme for accessing and sharing the benefits of genetic resources. The aims of setting up such a scheme are to prevent biopiracy and regulate relations between the countries supplying and using genetic resources. This will entail regulating access to genetic resources and guaranteeing the fair and equitable sharing of any benefits derived from their use or commercialisation. The 9th meeting of the Working Group access to genetic resources and benefit-sharing (ABS) will be held in Montreal from 10 to 16 July, during the Belgian Presidency. This will be the final panel-level meeting to draft a protocol to submit for approval at the 10th Conference of the Parties (COP).

Calendar of events

8-9 September 2010

'Biodiversity post-2010 - Biodiversity in a changing world'
Conference organised by the Region of Flanders

16-19 November 2010

Conference on 'Positive visions for Biodiversity'
BELSPO & EPBRS-EU Presidency Event (Brussels)

14 October 2010 and 20 December 2010

Environment Council (Brussels)