

## Report of the Eleventh Global Biodiversity Forum: Exploring Synergy between the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity

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**B**IODIVERSITY supplies goods and services to human populations, it protects and regulates life-sustaining resources such as water, air, soil and climate, and it supports important species inter-relationships. For these reasons, humans have an obligation to conserve the biological diversity that is supplied by the earth. In the past, international obligations made toward conserving biodiversity had been addressed in isolation to other environmental agreements. This has led to fragmentation in the international environmental agenda. The Eleventh Global Biodiversity Forum (GBF) attempted to create a link between the conservation of biodiversity and one of the most recent and notorious environmental issues — climate change.

The Global Biodiversity Forum is a regular mechanism used by nations to discuss and analyse significant environmental, economic, institutional and social issues related to the global conservation of biodiversity. The *Report of the Eleventh Global Biodiversity Forum* was published by the IUCN to communicate the key themes and challenges emerging from the forum to the public. The 11th GBF was held during the fourth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in November 1998. Climate change is considered to be one of the major threats to biodiversity at the species and ecosystems levels, and this Forum sought to address issues shared by the two agendas.

The Report is divided into three short parts. Part I is doubtlessly the most informative, by examining the threat climate change poses toward maintaining biodiversity. It summarizes the background to the 11th GBF and its emerging outcomes. Part II provides a full report of the key issues discussed at the Forum, including the opening and closing plenaries. Part III, the Appendices, encloses the concluding statement delivered to the UNFCCC as a result of the Forum, as well as a detailed list of participants that attended.

Part I of the Report presents a background to climate change, the recent effects that have arisen, and the international efforts made to address the problem, with reference to the international obligations made at the Kyoto Protocol. Links are made between climate change and biodiversity, by acknowledging that the stresses created by climate change will be detrimental to many ecosystems, resulting in a loss of species and the services they

provide. The greatest link existing between the climate change and biodiversity agendas was identified as forests, due to the role of forest conservation in both protecting biodiversity and slowing climate change. For this reason, forest management is a dominant theme occurring throughout the Report. The concluding results of the Forum suggest that the synergy existing between the issues of climate change and biodiversity indicates that a mutually supportive relationship should be developed in the international arena between the related Parties, and both issues must be taken into account collectively.

These major themes are expanded upon in Part II where a full report from four discussion workshops is provided. The first focused on the role of forest activities in the climate change agenda, and investigated measures to link forest conservation and climate change mitigation. The second workshop's theme was based on the role of economic incentives in promoting the objectives of the UNFCCC. Two modalities were presented to assist the financing for climate change mitigation: an international carbon tax and the allocation of emission permits. The third theme centred on co-ordinating the growing number of international agreements for conserving biodiversity, many of which contradict one another, leading to a fragmented international regime. It was suggested that areas of common concern such as forestry, be addressed in a co-ordinated manner between the different agendas. The fourth workshop brought the previous three themes together by focusing on sustainable use and climate change.

The 11th GBF took a political standpoint by critiquing the progress and efficiency of current international obligations made in addressing biodiversity and climate change. It is clear that although progress has been made since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, it has been less than adequate in exploring the common threads existing between these and other environmental agendas. The outcomes of the Forum successfully combined the roles of all stakeholders, including governments, NGOs, the private sector and indigenous communities to piece together the fragmented nature of global biodiversity conservation. Although this approach recommended by the IUCN is highly relevant in theory, the outcomes of the Forum did not appear to contain new insights to the problem, therefore I am skeptical to whether they will be adopted in practice.

I commend the parties involved for their contribution to adopting an holistic approach to environmental management by combining two very significant environmental issues. It is hopeful that international communications such as the GBFs will continue to assist in creating a less fragmented environmental regime.

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