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Celebrating 2010 as International Year of Biodiversity

Biological diversity - or biodiversity - is the term given to the variety of life on earth and the natural patterns it forms. Biodiversity provides a large number of goods and services to our lives. It also provides a range of ecological, economical, environmental, cultural and aesthetic benefits to human beings. Human life, directly or indirectly, depends upon the existence of the biodiversity in the world.

However, biodiversity is facing threats from several drivers of change including climate change, changes in land use, and socio-economic and development changes. The threats are aggravated by human activity such as deforestation, overexploitation of resources, illegal harvesting, and land conversion. In the context of climate change, biodiversity is facing additional threats. The Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), in their 2007 report, projects that about 20 to 30 percent of plant and animal species will be in danger of extinction if the rise in global average temperature exceeds 2.5°C. Furthermore, threats to biodiversity are threats to the livelihoods of people, especially in the mountainous region where biodiversity plays a critical role in sustaining the life of local people and where biodiversity forms the basis of people's culture and traditions. It has been estimated that 45 percent of the earth's original forests have been cleared mostly during the past century.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from June 2-14, 1992, is regarded as important international effort taken in order to protect the biodiversity on earth. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is the first global agreement for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. The Convention has three main goals: conservation of biodiversity, sustainable use and equitable benefit sharing.

In order to tackle the common problems of biodiversity loss on which our life depends, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity (Resolution 61/203). This year coincides with the 2010 Biodiversity Target adopted by the Parties to the CBD and by Heads of States and Governments at the World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. The slogan for this year is "***Biodiversity is life, Biodiversity is our life***". It aims to raise awareness of the importance of biodiversity through activities and events in many countries; to influence decision makers, and "to keep biodiversity issues on the top of the political

agenda. For the Celebration of the International Biodiversity Year 2010, the Secretariat of the CBD, based in Montreal, Canada, is coordinating the activities.

Although comprising only 0.09% of the global area, Nepal possesses disproportionately large diversity of flora and fauna at genetic, species and ecosystem levels. Nepal possesses over 2% of the world's flowering plants, about 9% of world's birds species, about 4% of the world's mammalian species. A great deal of effort has been made over the past years to protect and manage biological diversity in Nepal. It has been recognized that biodiversity is the mainstay of Nepal's economy and well-being of her people. Expansion of protected areas, implementation of community and leasehold forestry programme, formulation of biodiversity conservation strategy, and its implementation plan, formulation of action plans of different endangered species are some noteworthy steps taken by the Government of Nepal in order to protect biodiversity. Despite these achievements, fundamental problems such as, extreme poverty, population pressure, low level of awareness, poaching and smuggling of endangered species from natural forest and protected areas are still prevailing.

Nepal, as a signatory member of CBD, has important responsibility to celebrate this year as biodiversity year not only because of the international obligation but also because of the people's dependency on biological resources and its contribution to local livelihoods. In this context, a high-level action committee under the auspices of the National Biodiversity Coordination Committee of Nepal has been formed to celebrate this year as the International Year of Biodiversity (IYB). The IYB is a unique opportunity to increase understanding of the vital role of biodiversity on earth. It is also a celebration of life on earth and of the value of biodiversity for our lives. Thus, several programmes are being organized during the year 2010, some of these include: organizing international conference on biodiversity and climate change in the Himalayas, organizing national conference on traditional medicine and medical practitioners, awareness campaigns involving school children, friends of zoo, eco-clubs, guest speeches in the college and universities, capacity building on biodiversity documentation, national biodiversity exhibition, establishment of gene bank. Over 50 different stakeholders including civil society organizations, local community groups, academia, government and non-government organizations, and private sector are involved in organizing various programmes to celebrate the IYB 2010.

Let us join our hands together to celebrate 2010 as an international year of biodiversity in order to achieve cooperation, better collaboration, and wider networking.