



Statement by Jon Gunnar OTTOSON
President of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention
28. April 2010

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am grateful for having this opportunity to address this Conference, “Working together for biodiversity”, on behalf of The Bern Convention.....The European Biodiversity Day...

- The Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats is an old and mature convention. It was negotiated at the Council of Europe in the late 1970's and was opened for signature in Bern in Switzerland in September 1979, on the occasion of the Third European Ministerial Conference on the Environment. The Bern Convention is therefore over 30 years old, making it one of the oldest environmental treaties which has nevertheless kept in line with changing times.
- The Bern Convention has now 50 contracting parties, including all European states except for Russia, Belarus and San Marino. The Convention is open to Africa as well and currently four African states are parties.
- In its 30 years of existence the Bern Convention has turned out to be a very, innovative and effective tool to achieve our common aims to conserve the wild nature of Europe and beyond. It covers all aspects of biodiversity and has incorporated important principles such as precaution, integration, participation and co-operation long before they were mainstreamed. It has also proven to be an important instrument for achieving sustainability as it takes account of the role that people play in the wider environment and their interactions with nature.
- The Bern Convention has not only been the platform for close co-operation between countries on nature conservation issues but also an important forum for a necessary dialogue between Governments and NGO's, something that has proven to be invaluable throughout the years. I don't think any other regional or global treaty on environmental issues gives these *much so needed watch-dogs* such a good access to Governments with their complaints and valuable advice.
- In that context the monitoring system developed by the Convention, the unique *case-file system*, dating back to 1982, has proven to be a very successful problem solving instrument – not only due to effective procedural rules but also because of the apparent will of most Parties to co-operate between themselves and not the least with the NGO's in order to facilitate and find friendly settlements of disputes.

- Throughout the history of the Convention, NGO's have played an important role. They have participated actively in the various expert groups as well as in the meetings of the Standing Committee. Their work have been to a large extend integrated in the decisionmaking process.
- In the 1990's the Rio-conference on Environment and Development had the international floor with the new Conventions on Biological Diversity and on Climate Change, concentrating on sustainability. At the European level the EU-countries were much occupied with their Habitats- and Birds directives and Natura 2000, and did not consider the Bern Convention a priority (although it was the main reason for the adoption of both directives!). Then the view became rather widespread that the old fashioned Bern Convention, dealing with its annexes on species and habitats, would not live much longer, being out of date.
- But, to make a long story short – the Bern Convention turned out to be a more solid and flexible instrument than anticipated by many. The Convention adjusted to new thinking, to new challenges and evolved to keep its position as the main legal instrument for nature conservation in Europe and neighbouring countries. Also it has established itself by its various programmes, strategies and other activities as an important regional implementation tool for the global UN Convention on biodiversity and sustainable use of it's components, the CBD.
- The Bern Convention has been innovative in areas of great concern. It was the first legal instrument to contemplate species and habitat protection together, laying the path for networking of protected area systems. The Convention has created, together with Natura 2000 a coherent ecological network for Europe – the Emerald Network.
- The Bern Convention has been inovative in it's work on Threatened Species, on Invasive Alien Species, Biodiversity and Climate Change and most recently on Island Biodiversity.
- In this context I should draw your attention to some recent initiatives like the European Strategy on Invasive Alien Species from 2003. The European Strategy for the Conservation of Invertebrates, adopted in 2006, which brings together the problems and requirements of invertebrate conservation across Europe. Remembering that these small creatures, which form most of the biological diversity and biomass of our planet and are essential for health of ecosystems, are increasingly threatened.
- Also, The European Charter on Hunting and Biodiversity, adopted by The Standing Committee of the Convention in 2008, dealing with all relevant aspects of hunting and wildlife conservation. A charter which had it's origin in a Recommendation adopted by the Parliamentry Assembly of the Council of Europe.
- A good relationship and co-operation with other regional and international biodiversity-related conventions and international organizations are imperative. This beeing recognized by the signing of several Memorandum of Co-operation with other conventions like the CBD, CMS and Ramsar, and the IUCN among others and their implementation. The ongoing good and efficient co-operation with the European Environment Agency and the European Commission should also be highlighted.

- Dear colleges, the Bern Convention does not only have past achievements, but a lot of ambitions for the future.
- The Convention recognises the close interdependence between human rights and environmental quality and intends to play, as before, an important role in promoting the conservation and sustainable use of wild fauna and flora and natural habitats in Europe and beyond.
- The Convention will in the near future focus particular on work in the fields of invasive alien species, climate change and biodiversity, protected areas and ecological networks, and island biodiversity.
- Climate change issues are and have been high on the international political agenda, but it must be admitted that climate change policy has not been fully complementary with biodiversity policy, which it needs to be. Also it must be recognized that both policies must be developed in an integrated manner, given that there is a large potential for synergies and co-benefits between biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation and adaptation, including ecosystem-based approaches.
- We all recognize that the 2010 target to halt the loss of biodiversity has not been reached. It has, however, generated important actions for sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity at national, regional and global level. The target to halt the loss of biodiversity is still valid and even more urgent than before. There is, therefore, a need for a similar, ambitious overall target beyond 2010, emphasizing the intrinsic value of biodiversity and the need for healthy ecosystems for human well being.
- The Standing Committee of the Bern Convention recognizes that this year, The International Year of Biodiversity, will be critical for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use as we are now taking stock of the 2010 target and decide on a future vision and targets. By the time of the Standing Committee's next meeting, at the end of the year, the United Nations General Assembly high-level event on biodiversity, and the CBD COP-10 will have taken place. The Standing Committee will then have the opportunity to discuss the outcomes of decisions taken at the global level and create a clear European vision to the future. In light of the past successes of the Convention I am optimistic that we will make good progress in improving the state of Europe's natural heritage in the next years to come.
- To make progress it is imperative that this living Council of Europe's Convention, The Bern Convention, continues as a laboratory of ideas for the future of biodiversity conservation in Europe, being the only Convention that covers the whole of the continent.