



**CONVENTION ON  
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

**Statement by Hamdallah Zedan  
Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity  
to the International Wildland Fire Summit, Sydney, Australia, 8 October 2003**

On behalf of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), I wish to commend and thank the organizers of the International Wildland Fire Summit for selecting the vitally important theme of *Fire Management and Sustainable Development: Strengthening international cooperation to reduce the negative impacts of wildfires on humanity and the global environment*.

The marked rise in the number and extent of uncontrolled fires, with their accompanying destruction and distress is a world-wide phenomenon. To a large extent, this has been the result of too many unwanted fires and too few desirable fires. This year, one of the worst in recorded history, has witnessed an alarming increase in the number and extent of uncontrolled fires, starting with the devastation wreaked by the Canberra wildfire in January. Portugal, France, the Russian Federation, Canada and the United States have all suffered immense losses from wildfires in terms of timber and non-timber resources, wildlife habitat, forest biodiversity, and infrastructure.

While many ecosystems are adapted to fires and, in fact, require some fires to regenerate, fires are increasingly damaging important ecosystems such as forests – a situation of great concern in light of their role as important repositories of the earth's terrestrial biodiversity. As the effects of uncontrolled fires are likely to transcend political boundaries, international and regional cooperation in sharing information to promote more effective fire management that explicitly integrates institutional, policy, and scientific aspects is needed. To this end, the International Wildland Fire Summit represents a timely initiative.

The Convention on Biological Diversity can contribute in many ways with respect to the formulation of a strategy for future development of the issues and international responses to uncontrolled fires; in particular, with respect to forests. First, the role of the Convention as the focal point for forest biological diversity within the Collaborative Partnership on Forests enables it to make valuable contributions. Second, the expanded programme of work on forest biological diversity under the Convention, which mirrors the concerns of this Summit, includes activities that are relevant to fire prevention, management, and mitigation, on issues ranging from atmospheric pollution, climate change and ecological restoration, to protected areas, development of community-management systems, cross-sectoral integration and public education. The World Summit on Sustainable Development called upon countries to implement the programme. Third, the guidelines for the integration of biological diversity in impact assessment procedures being developed under the Convention on Biological Diversity can also be useful in assessing fire impacts. Fourth, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity has adopted a Strategic Plan with the target of achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss of biodiversity. This target was endorsed by the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The expanded programme of work on forest biological diversity serves as one mechanism to achieve the target.

This year, the Secretariat of the Convention was appointed as a member of the Working Group on Wildland Fire of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. It is our profound hope that the contribution of the Convention on Biological Diversity to the Group will help strengthen international cooperation in order to make uncontrolled fires a rarity. We are confident that the International Wildland Fire Summit will lead the way to achieving this goal, and look forward to contributing to the implementation of the outcomes of the Summit.

I wish the organizers and participants in the International Wildland Fire Summit a very successful meeting.