

THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

BIODIVERSITY

Biological diversity refers to the variety among living organisms and the ecological communities which they inhabit. Biodiversity encompasses three different concepts: ecosystem diversity (the range of different interacting systems present in a region, nation or the world); species diversity (the range of species in a given area); and genetic diversity (the range of possible heritable characteristics, genes, found in a population or species).³²

The Chair of this Committee, David MacDonald, opened the hearings on the Biodiversity Convention by saying:

The biodiversity convention, which was signed in June at the Earth Summit by, I believe, more than 150 countries, represents a major advance in international agreement with respect to an issue of growing concern. It is estimated that 15% of the earth's species could be lost over the next quarter century. In fact, it is thought that something like 100,000 species each year are now being lost.

The causes of this rapid rate of extinction are in part because of tropical rain forest destruction, destruction of wetlands, coral reefs, and the loss of temperate forest habitats. Of course, some of the more specific causes are habitat alteration or destruction, over-harvesting, improper use of agricultural chemicals, poverty, population growth, inequitable land distribution, excessive resource consumption, and on and on and on.³³

THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

A. Review of the Convention

The need to conserve biological diversity has become urgent. It has gone beyond the laboratory, and as UNCED demonstrated, it has become an issue debated in political arenas.

The objectives of this Convention, to be pursued in accordance with its relevant provisions, are the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources, including by appropriate access to genetic resources and by the appropriate transfer of relevant technologies, taking into account all rights over those resources and to technologies, and by appropriate funding.³⁴

³² Environment Canada, *Backgrounder, Proposed Global Convention on Biological Diversity*, 19 May 1992, p. 1.

³³ *Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence of the Standing Committee on Environment*, Issue No. 47, 23 November 1992, p. 6.

³⁴ Convention on Biological Diversity, United Nations Environment Programme, Na.92-7807, 5 June 1992.