PRESS RELEASE

UN Biodiversity Convention partners with Slow Food International in celebrating the International Day for Biological Diversity

Our Biodiversity, Our Food, Our Health

22 May 2019

Global Food Security under threat as biodiversity dramatically declines

- Even as commercial offerings become more diverse in many countries, what people buy and eat is becoming more homogenized.
- Today, 75% of Humanities' food is generated from only 12 plants and 5 animal species.
- The reliance of the global food production system on a limited number genetically uniform, high-yielding varieties of plants and animals is problematic for both the conservation of biodiversity and for human health.
- With the loss of diverse sources of food, our food security, Humanity is less resilient and able to cope with change, including climate change.
- Human health also suffers. The loss of diverse diets is directly linked to malnutrition and noncommunicable diseases such as diabetes, obesity and has a direct impact on the availability of healthy foods and traditional medicines.

22 May 2019 - The Convention on Biological Diversity is pleased to partner with the Slow Food International for this year's celebrations of the International Day for Biological Diversity, on 22 May 2019, which focuses on biodiversity as the foundation of our health and food systems.

The International Day of Biodiversity "Our Biodiversity, Our Food, Our Health, aims to raise awareness of the interconnectedness of our health and food systems with biodiversity.

The theme celebrates the most tangible aspects of biological and cultural diversity – Nature and Cultures – through our food and health systems.

“Biodiversity is not a luxury, but a fundamental pre-requisite for our well-being,” emphasised Dr Cristiana Paşca Palmer, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity. “It is the foundation of our food systems and our health. We cannot afford to overlook our dependence on Nature or take her abundance for granted.”

She is joined by the President of Slow Food International, Mr. Carlo Petrini, who reflected that "The biodiversity of microorganisms, of plant and animal species, of ecosystems, of traditional knowledge, is our insurance for the future, because it allows adaption to climate change and ensures the wellbeing of local communities. The global food production and distribution system, based on an industrial model applied to nature, has not resolved the problems of hunger and malnutrition, but has instead produced devastating consequences, transforming agriculture into something that exploits and destroys natural environments. On this day, Slow Food asks governments to adopt decisive measures in favour of a sustainable food and agriculture model that respects human health and the health of the environment, asks farmers and food producers to commit to promoting and applying it and asks citizens to support it in their everyday food choices.”

As the human population reaches 7.7 billion people in 2019, more than half living in urban areas[1], the average person in developed countries roaming supermarket aisles may be under the impression that our modern globalised food production system generates unprecedented food consumer choices.

And that diversity is growing around the world, as people take advantage of economic growth and urbanization to move away from basic staples like rice and beans, adding meat and dairy and processed foods. Liberalized trade rules and globalization have spread global food brands, a highly visual indication of the luxury of choice.

But even as commercial offerings become more diverse, what people actually buy and eat is becoming more homogenized. Simplification, rather than diversification, is the animating theme of the global food production system, and this is problematic for both the conservation of biodiversity and the promotion of human health.

For example, over the preceding 100 years, more than 90 per cent of crop varieties have disappeared from farmers’ fields;[2] half of the breeds of many domestic animals have been lost. All the world’s 17 main fishing grounds are now being fished at or above their sustainable limits, and many fish populations have reached or are near extinction. Loss of forest cover, coastal wetlands, other ‘wild’ uncultivated areas, the destruction of the aquatic and terrestrial environments and degradation of soil, and the spread of invasive species exacerbate the genetic erosion of agrobiodiversity. Genetic erosion results from the replacement of local varieties by “improved” or exotic varieties and species.

The human and community impact of this global homogenization and loss of agrobiodiversity is striking. Locally varied food production systems, including related indigenous, traditional and local knowledge, and the diverse cultures and skills of women and men family farmers, are under threat.

Human health also suffers. The loss of diverse diets is directly linked to malnutrition and non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, obesity and has a direct impact on the availability of healthy foods and traditional medicines.

[1] 55.3% of the human population is living in urban areas 2019.

[2] Crop diversity is the variance in genetic and phenotypic characteristics of plants used in agriculture. Crop diversity loss threatens global food security, as the world's human population depends on a diminishing number of varieties of a diminishing number of crop species.

In a world where half of humanity lacks access to essential modern health services, and 100 million people are still pushed into extreme poverty because of health expenses, traditional and alternative medicines are increasingly the first port of call. For most of the population in many countries, in times of illness, traditional medicine is an important source of healthcare.[3]

The UN Convention on Biological Diversity, Slow Food International and other partners, the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations**,** International Fund for Agricultural Development, the United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, as well as global movements such as the EAT Foundation, and the Food and Land Use Coalition (FOLU), are working together to identify transformative actions in global food production that can ensure a bright future for both humanity and nature. Promoting agrobiodiversity, locally sourced, diverse and seasonal foods, is a concrete action that governments, farmers, and consumers can take to increase community and ecosystem resilience to climate change, improve dietary health, and increase food security.

We invite all citizens concerned with accelerating loss of the Earth's biological diversity, concerned at the damage we are perpetrating on Nature to take a moment to celebrate the International Day for Biological Diversity, 22 May, 2019 – Our Biodiversity, Our Food, Our Health, and as you share your food with loved ones tonight, to take a moment to reflect on your relationship with Nature and the foods and medicines she provides.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Slow Food International
Slow Food is a global network of local communities founded in 1989 to prevent the disappearance of local food cultures and traditions and counteract the rise of fast food culture. Since its founding, Slow Food has grown into a global movement involving **millions of people in over 160 countries**, working to ensure that **everyone** has access to good, clean and fair food. Slow Food is the umbrella organization responsible for guiding the entire movement, which reaches millions of people every year.
Slow Food's goal is to fix the broken food system by moving toward diversified **agroecological food systems**.

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Convention on Biological Diversity
Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and entering into force in December 1993, the Convention on Biological Diversity is an international treaty for the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of the components of biodiversity and the equitable sharing of the benefits derived from the use of genetic resources. With 196 Parties, the Convention has near universal participation among countries. The Convention seeks to address all threats to biodiversity and ecosystem services, including threats from climate change, through scientific assessments, the development of tools, incentives and processes, the transfer of

[3] www.who.int/news-room/detail/13-12-2017-world-bank-and-who-half-the-world-lacks-access-to-essential-health-services-100-million-still-pushed-into-extreme-poverty-because-of-health-expenses

technologies and good practices and the full and active involvement of relevant stakeholders including indigenous and local communities, youth, NGOs, women and the business community.

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Facts
100 YEARS OF AGRICULTURAL CHANGE: SOME TRENDS AND FIGURES RELATED TO AGROBIODIVERSITY[4]

- Since the 1900s, some 75 percent of plant genetic diversity has been lost as farmers worldwide have left their multiple local varieties and landraces for genetically uniform, high-yielding varieties.
- 30 percent of livestock breeds are at risk of extinction; six breeds are lost each month.
- Today, 75 percent of the world's food is generated from only 12 plants and five animal species.
- Of the 4 percent of the 250 000 to 300 000 known edible plant species, only 150 to 200 are used by humans. Only three - rice, maize and wheat - contribute nearly 60 percent of calories and proteins obtained by humans from plants.
- Animals provide some 30 percent of human requirements for food and agriculture and 12 percent of the world's population live almost entirely on products from ruminants.

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[4] United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization