



Press Release
47th Cairo Climate Talks
May 2nd, 2017

“Biodiversity in a Changing Climate”

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Human survival and wellbeing depend upon biodiversity and healthy ecosystems, and the goods and services they provide. Yet, in recent decades, the world has experienced unprecedented biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation, undermining the very foundations of life on Earth. Rapid demographic changes, over-consumption, and the use of technologies that damage the environment, now combined with climate change, are pushing our planet to its limits.

According to a recent World Wildlife Foundation’s study, current species extinction rates are estimated to be between 1,000 and 10,000 times higher than the natural extinction rate. Most optimistic studies claim an annual species loss between 200 to 2,000 species every year. Since all living organisms are part of an integrated and interdependent web; and each species has its own role, a malfunction or loss of any part of the ecosystem can cause an imbalance that affects all other parts.

In response to these concerns, numerous states have negotiated the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity in order to conserve biodiversity, ensure fair and equitable sharing of its benefits, and promote biodiversity as a cornerstone towards achieving sustainable development. The 14th Conference of the Parties to the Biodiversity Convention (CBD/COP14) will meet in Egypt in late 2018. In preparation for this conference a panel of experts from Egypt and Germany as well as a delegation from the Secretariat of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity assembled for the 47th Cairo Climate Talks.

“It is only when nature falls out of balance that we realize how much our existence relies on it”, opened H.E. Julius Georg Luy, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Egypt, the discussion at the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) on Tuesday evening. He further explained that “the costs for restoring damaged ecosystems are ten times higher than for nature conservation”. In an effort to conserve biodiversity Germany has been providing more than half a billion euros annually for the conservation of forests and other ecosystems in more than 70 countries since 2013. Dr. Yasmine Fouad, Assistant Minister of Environment, reflected in her opening remarks that biodiversity and ecosystem balance in a changing climate can only be maintained when “related topics like food security, sustainable land management, protection of coral reefs, and the promotion of sustainable tourism are thought of in a holistic and

integrated approach". As a guest of honor, Dr. Christina Paşca Palmer, Assistant Secretary General and Executive Secretary of the Secretariat of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, gave a keynote speech in which she highlighted that "biodiversity and the ecosystem services it supports, are the Gross Domestic Product of the poor". She mentioned the Egyptian coral reefs as an example which are "an important attraction in nature-based tourism and contribute a significant portion to Egypt's tourism dollars" and at the same time "many coastal Egyptian communities rely on these coastal habitats for food and for shoreline protection".

Prof. Dr. Hamdallah Zedan who acts as the National Focal Point for the preparation of the CBD/COP14 next year in Sharm El Sheikh, said that the "focus will be particularly on energy, mining, health, industry, and infrastructure". In a straightforward statement he pointed out that "biological diversity cannot be put into a museum. If we don't use it, we will lose it! You have to preserve and you have to utilize components of the biological diversity and then you share the benefits arising from the utilization of these components particularly the genetic resources." This is the task of the Egyptian National Gene Bank which stores genetic resources and makes them available to the public. For agricultural purposes Egyptian farmers can get seeds free of charge but if the recipient is seeking to obtain a seed for medicinal or commercial purposes, then an exchange takes place either in the form of technology transfer or financial payment. The Gene Bank's president Prof. Hanaiya El-Itriby further explained, "these funds are used for capacity building, project funding and the implementation of projects within the Gene Bank itself".

Bridging economic development and the conservation of biodiversity needs Environmental Impact Assessments prior to implementation of any kind of development project. Dr. Lisa Biber-Freudenberger from the Center for Development Research at the University of Bonn in Germany mentioned that "the problem is that even if we have the right laws; it does not mean that what is happening on the ground was intended by the law. In many cases we don't actually have the biodiversity data to do a proper Environmental Impact Assessment". Noor A. Noor, Executive Coordinator at Nature Conservation Egypt, confirmed by saying that even if strong institutions are in place enforcement is still critical. "When it comes to biodiversity the issue is that – except for the wind energy sector – we don't have a standardized set of rules and regulations relating to the different components of biodiversity", he added.

All panelists agreed that more investment should be allocated into the education of our children in order to teach them about the value of our natural resources. However, "dismantling the culture of consumerism" has to be done at the same time as Noor A. Noor put it. Local communities are being marginalized too often although they are in the core of the equation.

Background Information:

The Cairo Climate Talks are conceived, organized and hosted as a cooperation between the German Embassy in Cairo, the Egyptian Ministry of Environment, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). For more information, please visit our website or contact info@cairoclimatetalks.net.