
The International Coral Reef Initiative

New Global Coral Reef Partnership Supports Biodiversity Goals

Under Secretary Wirth

*Remarks at the First Conference
of the Parties, Convention on
Biological Diversity, Nassau, the
Bahamas, December 7, 1994*

On behalf of the United States of America, I am pleased to congratulate this body on the work of the first Conference of Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity. This historic occasion marks a significant milestone in the development of an international framework for protecting the environment, promoting sustainable development, and improving the quality of life for current and future generations.

This meeting is also an important leg in the journey toward the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the utilization of genetic resources. At a time when the destruction of biological diversity, mostly as a result of human activity, is taking place at an alarming rate, the international community's commitment to the objectives of the convention signals our collective resolve to recognize the life-sustaining qualities of the Earth's biological resources. This was clearly enunciated in Executive Director Dowdswell's excellent opening statement.

Acknowledging the impact of unsustainable patterns of consumption and rapid population growth—themes echoed at the Cairo Conference on

Population and Development—we meet here to forge common cause on behalf of the fragile ecosystems that are storehouses of our biological inheritance and pledge to work together to ensure that these resources are wisely managed for the benefit of our citizens, their children, and grandchildren.

U.S. Commitment to Biodiversity

The United States' commitment to biodiversity and its importance to our people and our economy is rooted in a long tradition of U.S. public concern for the conservation of living natural resources. We are proud to have invented the idea of national parks and to have developed the first comprehensive law for the protection and restoration of endangered species.

And just as we are committed to taking necessary policy measures, so, too, are we committed to maintaining our significant efforts to strengthen scientific understanding of our biological resources. That is why we have developed a major new effort to catalogue our biodiversity and make more informed management decisions. Through the National Biological Survey and other efforts, solid science serves as the foundation for our efforts on behalf of both the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. These principles characterize our efforts to restore the world famous Everglades of Florida and our plan to conserve the remaining primary conifer forest of the Pacific Northwest while also promoting a stable forest products economy in the region.

International Initiatives

Internationally, the United States and our citizens look forward to joining with all nations not only in ratifying this convention—which President Clinton is pursuing vigorously—but also in forging partnerships which help to conserve and sustainably use biological resources around the globe.

We believe that bilateral and multilateral collaboration, as envisioned in Article 5, can be very useful in beginning to share the technology, techniques, and scientific information that are needed to provide the basis for effective conservation and sustainable use, as well as the sharing of the benefits of biodiversity. We are aware that the one unmistakable ingredient for realizing these objectives is political will and the United States stands ready to pursue opportunities for on-the-ground practical cooperation on these issues—developed and developing nations working together regionally and internationally.

Through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the United States supports a \$74-million annual portfolio of projects with more than 40 developing country partners. These projects embrace the three primary objectives of the convention—conservation and sustainable use of biological resources and the sharing of benefits from their use. For example, we are working together on:

- The management of forests, protected areas, and coastal zones;
- The sustainable extraction of non-timber forest products;
- Innovative financing mechanisms, such as conservation endowments and environmental funds; and
- Programs that build capacity in areas of biosafety, *ex situ* conservation and the equitable sharing of benefits from bio-prospecting.

Each program recognizes that sustainable development must be based on the aspirations and experiences of ordinary people and their participation in determining solutions. USAID works with both government and non-government organizations to build capacity, enhance participation, encourage accountability, and empower communities and individuals. We hope that future initiatives will even more broadly take into account the knowledge and expertise of indigenous peoples, especially women.

Global Partnerships for Coral Reef Protection

One of the most exciting and emerging partnerships is in the area of the conservation and sustainable use of coral reefs. Coral reefs serve as natural indicators of the health of coastal zones, have been cited as possible indicators of climate change, and are valued contributors to economies the world over through their contributions to recreation and tourism. Indeed, their biological and economic richness has led many to observe that coral reefs are the "rainforests of the ocean." Nowhere is this clearer than here in the Bahamas, as Prime Minister Ingraham so eloquently stated in the opening address.

In response to pressures placed on coral reefs and prompted by concerns for their future, the United States has helped develop an international partnership aimed at protecting, managing, and monitoring coral reef resources and related ecosystems such

as mangroves and sea grass beds. We are proud that the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) has attracted diverse participation from such nations as Japan, Australia, Jamaica, the United Kingdom, France, and the Philippines. Together, we have issued information and invitations to more than 50 nations, and we urge all participants here to join us in this growing partnership.

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Tim Wirth

As part of this initiative, I am pleased to relate that the United States is providing first year funds for a global coral reef monitoring position under the combined auspices of the UN Environment Program (UNEP), the International Oceans Committees (IOC), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). The purpose of this effort is to coordinate coral reef monitoring projects. We are encouraging other partners and associated organizations to assist in funding beyond the first year.

The first major milestone under the International Coral Reef Initiative will be an international workshop to be held in the Philippines in 1995, and we are hopeful that powerful momentum can be gained as we move toward the 1996 Coral Reef Symposium to be held in Panama, and the "Year of the Reef" when it is established.

The unique aspect of the International Coral Reef Initiative is its ability to combine grass-roots initiated ideas with support, and to make use of existing institutions to achieve its goals. For instance, the United States and Japan have formed a group under the US-Japan Common Agenda to develop joint projects that will support the objectives of the initiative.

Support Voiced for Biological Diversity Convention

U.S. multilateral concern for biological diversity extends to the work of this body and this convention. As signatories of the convention, it is this Administration's intent to continue to seek its ratification. We have already contributed to the Global Environmental Facility or GEF with the desire that it serve as the financial mechanism to provide new and additional funding for the convention.

We welcome the support the Conference of the Parties (CoP) has given to the fully restructured GEF. The decision to continue the services of the GEF as the convention's institutional structure sends the necessary signal to move forward expeditiously to conserve biological diversity, make sustainable use of its components. The CoP's decision on a package of policy guidance to the GEF will ensure the effective prioritization of action.

We also welcome the CoP's decision to study the ways and means of involving other sources of funding, outside the financial mechanism, to achieve the objectives of the convention. We look forward to a full review of the ways and means of channeling these resources outside of the financial

mechanism to more effectively conserve and sustainably use biological diversity—working with international financial institutions to bring the resources of their programs to bear on behalf of the aims and objectives of this convention.

Again, Madame President, I want to thank you and the Government of the Bahamas for the outstanding efforts that have been made to ensure the

success of this inaugural meeting for the Convention on Biological Diversity. President Clinton decided to bring the United States into this agreement and the mainstream of international environmental cooperation—we look forward to demonstrating that this is an effective mechanism for addressing global concerns in a world that becomes more interdependent—economically and environmentally—every day. No doubt, it is

difficult and trying to overcome our differences and work side-by-side, not only on behalf of our own citizens but the citizens of the world. To those who question whether we can afford to try, we say that we cannot afford not to. ●