

## **Message**

**from the German Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development,  
Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul,**

**on International Day for Biological Diversity 2008**

**(Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Reserve, South Africa)**

### **Man and the Biosphere**

This is the eighth year that the German government, GEO magazine and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity have joined together to mark International Day for Biological Diversity.

I am delighted that this year's GEO biodiversity day is taking place in the Kruger to Canyons biosphere reserve. The people who live here take responsibility for their surroundings. They also know that they have the unique opportunity to protect the natural environment and use it in a sustainable way. It was due to that sense of responsibility that in 2001 Kruger to Canyons was recognised as a biosphere reserve under the UNESCO programme "Man and the Biosphere" (MAB). Wherever people live in and with the natural environment and respect it, overarching global initiatives such as the UNESCO programme come to life.

Under this global programme, UNESCO identifies biospheres that are promoting the protection and sustainable development of manmade cultivated landscapes. Naturally, agriculture plays an important role in these cultivated landscapes. That fits in very well with the theme of this year's International Day of Biological Diversity on 22 May, which is "Biodiversity and Agriculture". The topic has been chosen in order to focus attention on the important role that the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity plays in nutrition and general wellbeing and also in achieving food security. The Kruger to Canyons biosphere reserve is an excellent example, showing how vital it is to achieve harmony between transfrontier protected areas, farmland and cultural diversity. The Kruger to Canyons biosphere reserve is part of the Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Peace Park, which the German government is actively supporting. This means overcoming not only the

regional borders between the provinces of Limpopo and Mpumalanga but also national borders, such as with Mozambique

I am delighted that the celebrations for the International Day for Biological Diversity are part of a sustainable living festival, which will also serve to highlight how important the biosphere is for regional development.

That accords totally with my concept of sustainable development. Conserving biodiversity is key to securing people's livelihoods and thus achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Because conserving biodiversity is much more than simply nature conservation or species protection. It is an active contribution to safeguarding all our futures – biodiversity is, after all, the basis of human life in developing and industrialised countries both today and in the future. Global sustainable development can only be achieved if we conserve the world's natural resources over the long term, enabling us to keep open as many development options as possible.

Germany is currently implementing 150 projects to support its partner countries in their efforts to conserve and make sustainable use of biodiversity. A wide variety of projects are being funded at local, regional, national and international level. They deal with issues ranging from equitable benefit-sharing, to effective management of protected areas, to averting the risks posed to the environment and human health by genetic engineering.

In a few days' time, the Ninth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity will begin in Bonn. The most important issue, to my mind, is that of equitable benefit-sharing. That is an aim to which I am personally committed!

The International Day of Biological Diversity is a great way of making the topic more tangible. It arouses people's curiosity and encourages them to get involved! I urge you to join forces with GEO, the Convention Secretariat and the government of South Africa. Let us join together in discovering, admiring and protecting the diversity that is all around us and taking that message from the Kruger to Canyons biosphere reserve out into the world.

I look forward to doing so and wish everyone involved a successful Day of Biological Diversity!

Best regards,

Heidemarie Wiczorek-Zeul

Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development