



**Ministerial Declaration of Burkina Faso, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire,
Mali, Niger and Senegal**

**On the occasion of the Ministerial Round Table on
“The role of Biosphere Reserves as Operational Sites for NEPAD”**

Paris, UNESCO Headquarters, 26 January 2004.

The Paris Declaration

We, the African ministers participating in the Round Table on the role of biosphere reserves as operational sites for NEPAD, held on 26 January 2004 in Paris, at the UNESCO Headquarters:

Recalling the United Nations Millennium Declaration adopted on 8 September 2000, as well as the commitments taken on that occasion for the promotion of sustainable development in Africa;

Recalling the Johannesburg Declaration and the Plan of Implementation adopted during the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg (South Africa), from 26 August to 4 September 2002, in particular chapter 8 on sustainable development in Africa;

Recalling the Declaration of the United Nations on the New Partnership for the Development of Africa, NEPAD, adopted on 16 September 2002 by the General Assembly of the United Nations;

Recalling the results of the UNESCO/NEPAD seminar on “From Vision to Action”, held in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) from 5 to 8 March 2003;

Recalling the adoption of the Action Plan on the Environmental Initiative of NEPAD during the second ordinary session of the African Union Assembly, held in Maputo (Mozambique) from 9 to 12 July 2003;

Taking note with satisfaction of the results of the Conference on the Global Partnership on the Environmental Initiative of NEPAD, which was held in Algiers (Algeria) from 15 to 16 December 2003;

Recalling the significant contribution of the intergovernmental scientific programme on Man and the Biosphere (MAB) of UNESCO, and of its World Network of Biosphere Reserves, to the conservation and the sustainable use of biological diversity according to the objectives of the Seville Strategy, adopted at the General Conference of UNESCO in 1995;

Welcoming the existence of the African Network for Biosphere Reserves (AfriMAB) created in Dakar (Senegal) in 1996, comprising 63 biosphere reserves in 29 countries;

Reaffirming the importance of taking into account the strong links existing between cultural diversity and biological diversity;

Noting the importance of biosphere reserves as demonstration sites for the conservation of biological diversity and ecosystems, of cultural diversity preservation and for the sustainable development, particularly to the benefit of local communities, as well as for training and capacity building in Africa;

Recalling the commitment of our countries in the implementation of the Convention on Combating Desertification and the Convention on Biological Diversity;

Recalling the importance of sub-regional cooperation for the preservation of savanna ecosystems, illustrated through the creation of the first transboundary biosphere reserve in Africa : the “W Region” Transboundary Biosphere Reserve between Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger, designated in November 2003;

Concerned by the continual degradation of the natural environment, caused by the concomitant aggravation of poverty and conflicts on the African continent;

Reaffirming the importance of biosphere reserves for the prevention of conflicts and the maintenance of peace;

Reaffirming our commitment to take up specific challenges of Africa as identified in the Plan of Implementation of Johannesburg adopted by the World Summit on Sustainable Development;

We welcome the launching of the UNESCO/UNEP (United Nations Environmental Programme) – GEF (Global Environmental Facility) regional project which is based on African local and national capacity building and which aims to involve all key stakeholders, including local communities, in the management of biosphere reserves for improving the conservation and the sustainable use of biological diversity;

We also welcome the sub-regional approach based on biosphere reserves in facilitating scientific cooperation and exchange of practices between African countries with less forest cover and confronted with the same problems of sustainable management of arid and semi arid ecosystems;

We commit ourselves to reinforcing sub-regional cooperation for the establishment of new transboundary biosphere reserves, following the examples of the “W Region” among Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger, and we request UNESCO and the MAB Secretariat to facilitate the establishment of new transboundary biosphere reserves;

We commit ourselves to promoting the use of biosphere reserves as operational sites of the sustainable development in combating poverty and in the implementation of the Action Plan of the NEPAD Environment Initiative;

We invite GEF and UNEP to continue their support to African countries in the implementation of sustainable development projects for the conservation of the environment and biological diversity, relying on biosphere reserves in particular, and other comparable sites in Africa, and invite other donors and agencies to join them;

We encourage UNESCO, especially its Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Secretariat and field offices in Africa, to further increase their efforts in strengthening the AfriMAB Network;

We invite the government of Senegal, as the Coordinator of the Priority Programme on Environmental Initiative, to transmit this declaration to the NEPAD Secretariat and the African Ministerial Conference on Environment (AMCEN), in order that the biosphere reserves of the AfriMAB Network be considered as operational sites for sustainable development in the implementation of the Environmental Action Plan of NEPAD;

We thank UNEP and GEF for their support to the implementation of the regional project on “Building Scientific and Technical Capacity for Effective Management and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity in Dryland Biosphere Reserves in West Africa”;

We express our gratitude to UNESCO and its Director-General for their support to the effective implementation of the regional project.

Paris, 26 January 2004.