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联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

**Message from Irina Bokova,**

**Director-General of UNESCO**

**on the occasion of the World Environment Day 2011**

**Forests: Nature at Your Service**

**5 June 2011**

This *World Environment Day* is an opportunity to celebrate the unique value of forests for humanity and the earth.

Forests are pillars of life. They are hosts to the world's great biodiversity. They feed the world's rivers, nourish its soil and replenish its air. They are vital for human well-being and development, underpinning directly the lifestyles of 1.6 billion people and providing essential services for all. Covering one third of the earth's land mass, forests embody the essential global good.

They lie also at the heart of our imagination and identity. Buddha dwelled in the forest. Martin Buber spoke of meeting the tree as a living "thou." Pablo Neruda wrote that his poetry was steeped in the forests. Our relationship with forests is basic, essential and primordial.

Yet, forests are everywhere in peril. Deforestation, especially, poses a rising threat. We must do more to counter the threats forests face in unsustainable resource extraction, habitat fragmentation, the introduction of non-native species, and the displacement of local communities.

With its partners in the United Nations, UNESCO is committed to conserving forest ecosystems. We are promoting collaboration among the three largest humid tropical forest regions of the world -- in Amazonia, the Congo Basin and Southeast Asia. The 2011 Tropical Forest Summit in Brazzaville in May was a milestone in this action.

Through our Man and the Biosphere Programme and its World Network of Biosphere Reserves, UNESCO is forging practical solutions on the ground, with and for local people. Our World Heritage Convention contributes to the protection of world forests of “outstanding universal value.” Concerns with forests lie at the core of our contributions to the biodiversity convention and the climate convention, and in the run-up to the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

Building green societies starts in the mind, with the way we think and behave. To this end, UNESCO promotes critical and ethical reflection about how we live with nature. We are developing an inventory of ethical tools for biodiversity and climate change. We work to protect biodiversity against biopiracy. We support education in environmental ethics and the preservation of indigenous knowledge. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, our *Regional Post-Graduate Training School on Integrated Management of Tropical Forests* is nurturing a new generation of African forest scientists and policy makers. This model is successful and should be replicated in other parts of the world.

As the poet Charles Baudelaire wrote, “Nature is a temple in which living pillars sometimes give voice to confused words; Man passes there through forests of symbols, which look at him with understanding eyes.” Forests mean the world. During this *2011 International Year of Forests* and beyond, we must do everything we can to protect them.

Irina Bokova