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**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**MESSAGE TO THE THIRD COLLOQUIUM  
OF THE IUCN ACADEMY OF ENVIRONMENTAL LAW  
Sydney, 11 July 2005**

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment released earlier this year was the first comprehensive global evaluation of the world's major ecosystems. The product of an unprecedented, four-year study involving natural scientists, scholars and environmental leaders from all over the world, it offers a sobering look at how human activities are causing environmental damage on a massive scale. It challenges all countries, all people and the IUCN Academy of Environmental Law to do more to protect the environment on which our lives depend.

The report tells us how biodiversity is declining at an alarming rate. Twenty-five percent of commercially exploited marine fish stocks are over-harvested. The conversion of wetlands, forests and mangroves is reducing the capacity of ecosystems to mitigate the effects of extreme weather events such as the recent tsunami in the Indian Ocean. If the world is to meet the agreed target of reducing the loss of biological diversity by 2010, and achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, we will need dramatic steps to change course.

Laws, regulations, enforcement measures, policy reforms, market mechanisms and investments in the management of critical ecosystems must all be part of the picture. Your colloquium on the law of biodiversity can provide essential guidance. We need legal tools that will turn recommendations into practice. And we need your suggestions as to how environmental law can bring about the policy, institutional and behavioural changes needed to deal with the root causes of environmental degradation.

The Millennium Ecosystem Report did not only sound an alarm; it also proposes solutions and strategies for restoring and maintaining ecosystems. It is encouraging to know that the World Conservation Union is involved in the search for solutions on an issue of great urgency to all humankind. Please accept my best wishes for the success of your deliberations.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Annan'.

Kofi A. Annan