



**STATEMENT BY BRAULIO F. DE SOUZA DIAS
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on the occasion of

**WORLD HEALTH DAY
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The focus of World Health Day 2012 and its theme, *Good health adds life to years*, on ageing serves not only to remind us that we are facing an ageing trend (the number of adults over the age 65 will soon outnumber children under the age of 5), but should also be viewed as a reminder and an opportunity to further explore and understand how human health is dependent, directly or indirectly, on biodiversity-supported ecosystem services.

Biodiversity underpins the functioning of the ecosystems on which we depend for food and fresh water and for regulating climate, floods and diseases. It is a source of medicines, supports physical and mental well-being, offers cultural and spiritual enrichment, and contributes to livelihoods, all of which have positive health impacts.

Evidence of the fundamental linkages between biodiversity and health continues to rise alongside the body of knowledge on the emergence and spread of emerging infectious diseases. However, the implications of biodiversity loss on the incidence of some non-communicable diseases (the leading cause of mortality worldwide, responsible for more than 36 million deaths in 2008) are less well understood.

Non-communicable diseases constitute the main health challenges faced by the globally ageing population regardless of the level of economic development. Widespread non-communicable diseases such as cancer, heart disease, stroke, lung disease, and diabetes are increasingly treated with preventative health measures or “lifestyle choices” that can benefit both human health and biodiversity. For instance, promoting dietary diversity can help increase the awareness of the value of biodiversity for nutrition and the impact of dietary choices on the protection of species, their genetic diversity and ecosystems; moderating food consumption as part of a healthy lifestyle may also encourage more

sustainable agriculture, fisheries and forest practices; and regular physical exercise can reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and encourage people to visit parks and other natural recreation spaces, which can then lead to a greater appreciation of natural settings.

Over the remaining years of this decade, governments around the world will work to realize targets that have as their goal, building a more sustainable relationship between human communities and the biodiversity that support them. As they engage in this endeavor, it is important to realize what is at stake is the health of the planet, and the health of all people – the young and the ageing.
