

**Message from H.E. Mrs. Marjatta Rasi, President of the Economic and Social Council
and Permanent Representative of Finland to the United Nations
on the occasion of 2004 World Food Day under the theme “Bio-Diversity for Food
Security”**

Food security is a global urgency especially for the nearly 1 billion undernourished and malnourished people in developing countries. It is deservedly one of the 8 targets of the Millennium Development Goals to reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger by 2015. Despite the encouraging achievements in many countries, less than 20 % of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are expected to reach the goal. In some countries, malnutrition is actually increasing.

Biodiversity helps to enable sustainable availability of food. However, the role of biodiversity in this context is broader than mere availability of food stuff variety. It plays a vital role in maintaining different ecosystems and sustainable development. It is a fundamental basis for agriculture and food production. Among its many other functions, biodiversity is a source of crop and animal varieties that are more adaptable to harsher environments of marginal lands often populated by the poor, and it is a supplier of micro-organisms that keep nature's engine running by cleaning water or regenerating agricultural soil. In other words, the topic of “biodiversity for food security” underlines the need to think and act with long-term sustainability in mind.

The interaction of biodiversity and food security is complex. It touches not only the scientific and environmental fields but also social and political factors. The latter may, for example, include education, national and global policy making, and legal frameworks. These aspects are required not only for local communities to protect the ecological diversity of their land, but also to develop policies that provide the necessary conditions for protection and safety of nature's diversity, and to determine the ownership and use of humanity's genetic reservoir of knowledge. Biodiversity has also a strong gender dimension as women and men often have different roles in maintenance of biodiversity, as well as a different level of dependence on biodiversity.

Availability of crop diversity reduces severe crop failures as local communities have a few more alternatives when drought, pests, diseases or other disasters strike. Thus, biodiversity decreases risks of farming and increases food security. Biodiversity also provides material to improve the genetic potential of crops and animals. Global commitment to eliminating hunger and ensuring food security requires a strong commitment to biodiversity. For example, we need to carefully consider the advantages and disadvantages of different modes of agricultural production, and see this in the context of long term environmental impacts. Safeguarding biodiversity means essentially also safeguarding traditional agricultural knowledge and management systems.