



The Gran Canaria Declaration

calling for a

Global Program for Plant Conservation



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Plants are universally recognized as a vital part of the world's natural heritage and an essential resource for the planet. They are a vital component of global sustainability. In addition to the small number of crop plants we use for our basic food and fibres, many thousands of wild plants have great economic and cultural importance and potential, providing food, fuel, clothing and shelter for vast numbers of people throughout the world. Plants supply many important medicines, especially in developing countries where hundreds of millions depend on wild plants for their traditional health systems. The World Health Organization (WHO) has estimated that up to 80% of the world's people rely on plants for their primary health care. Finally, plants play a key role in maintaining the planet's basic environmental balance and ecosystem stability and provide an important component of the habitats for the world's animal life.

As many as two-thirds of the world's plant species are in danger of extinction in nature during the course of the 21st century, threatened by population growth, deforestation, habitat loss, destructive development, over consumption of resources, the spread of alien invasive species and agricultural expansion. Further loss of plant diversity is predicted through genetic erosion and narrowing of the genetic basis of many species. The disappearance of such vital and massive amounts of biodiversity provides one of the greatest

challenges faced by the world community: to halt the destruction of the plant resources that are so essential for present and future needs.

Major efforts throughout the world are being undertaken by international agencies and national governments, supported by a great diversity of institutions, organizations and other groups at all levels to develop practical actions to safeguard plant diversity. Despite such efforts the number of plant species facing extinction continues to rise and a significant proportion of the genetic diversity of the world's estimated 300,000 vascular plant species is being lost.

Recognizing the critical situation and their particular responsibility to alert the global community, the botanists of the world, convened at the XVI International Botanical Congress in St Louis, Missouri, U.S.A., in August, 1999, attended by over 5,000 botanists from all parts of the world, noted in a resolution that as many as two-thirds of the world's plant species are in danger of extinction in nature during the course of the 21st century. They recognized that this threatens our expectation of using plant diversity to build sustainable, healthy and better lives for the future. The Congress called for plant conservation to be recognized as an outstanding global priority in biodiversity conservation.

Responding to the Congress resolution, an ad hoc group drawn from major international and national organizations, institutions and other bodies involved in biodiversity conservation from 14 countries came together in Gran Canaria, Spain on 3-4 April, 2000 to consider the need for a global initiative for plant conservation. The group resolved that a Global Strategy for Plant Conservation and associated program for its implementation should be developed urgently, within the framework of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. The aim of this strategic program would be to support and facilitate appropriate plant conservation initiatives at all levels, aimed at halting the current and continuing unacceptable loss of plant diversity.

Such a Strategy should develop effective mechanisms to enhance collaboration and networking, which will strengthen and support plant conservation locally, regionally, and internationally; to formally and informally link different partners such as government ministries, institutions, NGOs, and local community initiatives. This Strategy should link existing efforts of the many significant international and national programmes that are already active in this area. It should draw on and extend the experience and resources of bodies already active in implementing global conservation programmes, such as the FAO Global Plan of Action for the Conservation and Sustainable use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, supported by over 150 countries, the UNESCO Man and Biosphere program, DIVERSITAS, the Millennium Assessment of the World's Ecosystems, the International Agenda for Botanic Gardens in Conservation and the IUCN Species Survival Commission's Plants Programme. The Strategy should also be developed in full harmony with other initiatives currently under development, such as the global strategy on the sustainable conservation and use of forest genetic resources.

An element of this Strategy should be to integrate efforts in different disciplines (social, economic, and biological) towards plant conservation so that all appropriate and available resources, technologies, techniques and sectors are brought together in support of plant conservation. It should establish a means to gather and manage effectively the information required to support plant conservation actions, by means of a global electronic information system on plant diversity, its status, use and the threats it faces. This Strategy should also highlight the need for international programs in research and public education, to raise greater awareness of the importance of plants and the threats they face. The group agreed that such an initiative would require a coordination mechanism for information gathering, processing, and dissemination at appropriate levels, and particularly to support capacity building for plant conservation, especially in areas rich in plant diversity. Some major elements for a Global Strategy for Plant Conservation were agreed by the group and are outlined in an annex to this document.

At the meeting in Gran Canaria, the group resolved to forward this document to the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, in May 2000, to consider the development and subsequent implementation of a new global integrated plant conservation program, as an important component in achieving the objectives of the Convention.

Gran Canaria Declaration – Participants

Stephen Blackmore,	Director, Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, Scotland
David Bramwell,	Director, Jardín Botánico Canario Viera y Clavijo, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain
Peter Crane,	Director, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, U.K.
Braulio Dias,	Director, National Programme for Biodiversity Conservation, and Genetic Resources, Brasilia, Brazil
David Given,	Chairman, Plants Committee, IUCN Species Survival Commission, and Manager, International Centre for Nature Conservation, Lincoln University, Canterbury, New Zealand
Toby Hodgkin,	Principal Scientist, Genetic Resources Science and Technology Group, International Plant Genetics Resources Institute, Rome, Italy
Angela Leiva,	Director, Jardín Botánico Nacional de Cuba, La Habana, Cuba
Nancy R. Morin,	Chair, Conservation Committee, American Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta, and Director, Flagstaff Arboretum, Arizona, U.S.A.
P. Pushpangadan,	Director, National Botanical Research Institute, Lucknow, India
Peter H. Raven,	Director, Missouri Botanical Garden, St Louis, Missouri, U.S.A.
Cristián Samper,	Director General, Instituto Alexander von Humboldt, Bogotá Colombia
José Sarukhán,	DIVERSITAS, Chairman and Professor, Institute of Ecology, National University of Mexico, UNAM, Mexico
Jameson Seyani,	Director, National Botanic Gardens and National Herbarium, Zomba, Malawi, and Commonwealth Science Council, London, U.K.
Stella Simiyu,	Chair, East African Plants Specialist Group, IUCN Species Survival Commission, and National Museums of Kenya, Nairobi, Kenya.
Igor A. Smirnov,	Chair, Moscow Division of Botanic Gardens Conservation International, and Moscow Main Botanical Garden, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia
Peter Wyse Jackson,	Secretary General, Botanic Gardens Conservation International, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, U.K.

4th April, 2000

Annex: The Elements of a Global Strategy for Plant Conservation

A Global Strategy for Plant Conservation should include and combine a range of different elements relating to conservation practice, social and economic factors, information, monitoring and research, education, capacity building and public awareness.

It must have well defined and achievable goals for integrated (ex situ and in situ) conservation of plant diversity, linked to targets for research, information management, public education and awareness to attain these goals. It should have a mechanism to monitor and coordinate its implementation and to link and maximise available resources for plant conservation.

The main elements of such a Strategy would be:

Integrated ex situ and in situ conservation:

- Set agreed levels and standards in plant diversity conservation and services worldwide to be achieved within a defined time frame
- Give special attention to the conservation of the world's most important centres of plant diversity, including the ecosystems and the species they contain
- Support the maintenance of genetically diverse and accessible samples of the world's plant species in botanical collections throughout the world
- Pay special attention to the conservation of plant species of direct economic importance to human societies, especially crops and their wild relatives, forage plant species, agroforestry and forest species, medicinal plants and species used in other ways
- Control invasive alien plants and animals, which pose one of the greatest threats to plant diversity in natural habitats
- Develop and implement best practices in plant conservation which will ensure the fullest community and institutional participation at all levels

Research, Monitoring, and Information Management

- Undertake an ongoing international program of research on plant biology and interactions with social, cultural, and economic factors that impact biodiversity, so that the genetics and ecology of plants, both in the wild and in the context of human activities, can be well understood and utilised to support conservation action
- Document the plant diversity of the world, including up-to-date information on its distribution in the wild, its conservation status and trends, and its use and preservation in protected areas and ex situ collections
- Develop an integrated, distributed, interactive information system to manage and make accessible information on plant diversity
- Monitor the status and trends in global plant diversity and its conservation and produce regular reports

Social and Economic Benefits of Plant Diversity: Products and Services

- Identify and assess the socio-economic value and the cultural value both of particular species of plants and of plant diversity itself
- Identify and assess the existing and potential products and services provided by plant diversity
- Ensure that benefits derived from the use of plants are fairly and equitably shared
- Identify the underlying causes of plant diversity loss and assess the potential risks and constraints on its conservation, particularly in countries that are rich in plant diversity.

Education and Public Awareness

- Articulate and consistently emphasize the benefits of conserving plant diversity, to raise awareness of the importance of plants and the threats they face, thereby encouraging active participation in their conservation
- Inform citizens and policy makers in every country about conservation priorities and policy options for plant species and their ecosystems
- Use relevant botanical institutions, such as botanic gardens, museums, colleges, universities and research centres in every country, as shop windows for plant conservation by demonstrating the interdependence of human beings and plants within all ecosystems
- Incorporate the importance of plants and plant conservation into formal and informal education.

Implementing the Strategy

- Within the context of the United Nations, develop a comprehensive world-wide multi-institutional programme for conservation action
- Create a coordinating mechanism operating at various levels to oversee and monitor the achievement of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation and the implementation of the programme of plant conservation action
- Build the capacity of institutions and organizations worldwide to enhance their effective contributions and role in plant conservation
- Link, integrate and support efforts undertaken by a diversity of organizations, institutions, communities at all levels for plant conservation
- Identify and apply existing and new resources for plant conservation



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