

**Africa Environment Day - 3 March 2008**  
**Bofarm Ethiopia, Addis Ababa**

*Remarks by Dr. Strike Mkandla*  
*Representative to AU, UNECA & Ethiopia*  
*United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)*

Your Excellency, Ms. Rosebud Kurwijila, AU Commissioner for Rural Economy & Agriculture  
Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen, all protocols observed.

It is my great pleasure to say a few words on this occasion on behalf of UNEP and its Executive Director, Mr. Achim Steiner.

This is a special celebration of Africa Environment Day, because it was decided that there would be no long speeches but brief remarks by a few people. This is an important reminder that the time for talking has passed, and that this a time for action and practical implementation of measures on the ground. It is a time to get our hands dirty, in steps to deal with threats like climate change that face our continent and our communities. It is therefore no accident that the African Union Commission and its partners chose today to celebrate Africa Environment Day here at Biofarm, an Ethiopian initiative that has demonstrated in practice what can be done to sustainably utilize our indigenous medicinal plants and other resources.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,

The threat of climate change requires the concerted efforts of all. It is instructive that here at Biofarm there are concrete examples of how we can reduce the pressure on resource use through organic farming that also incorporates renewable energy (biogas) technology. This experience has great potential for combining conservation of resources with mitigation of climate change through reduced dependence on trees for firewood (whose burning emits carbon dioxide and whose cutting reduces carbon sinks).

It is no accident that, as in previous celebrations, we have received a message from the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Mr. Ahmed Djoghlaif. This message will be reproduced in full for media and other users, but I would like to draw your attention to the fact that Mr. Djoghlaif has reiterated the CBD Secretariat's commitment to support African Countries in their efforts to implement the Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, and related components of the Action Plan of the Environment Initiative of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the African Convention on Nature and Natural Resources (1968 Algiers Convention). Quoting conclusions from UNEP's Global Environment Outlook (GEO-4), Mr. Djoghlaif reminds us that a resilient and robust ecosystem, with diverse species, is a key factor in mitigating the effects of climate change.

At the national here in Ethiopia, this is a momentous week, when the country is celebrating the historic Battle of Adoa in this year of the Ethiopian Millennium, which has also been declared an African Millennium. The Battle of Adoa was a major milestone in maintaining the country's sovereignty and creation of a unique history of continuous independence except for a brief interlude when an attempt was made to entrench foreign control. The battle for survival in the face of environmental degradation and climate change is one that this country has shown a determination and resilience to win. The Millennium Campaign's "Two Trees for 2000" has realized and exceeded its target, making Ethiopia the biggest contributor to the UNEP "Plant for the Planet: Billion Tree Campaign". Today's symbolic planting of trees during Africa Environment Day is a re-commitment to the continent's contribution towards adaptation to climate change, which the AUC has championed in a series of initiatives in agriculture, energy, environment and natural resources.

May these trees grow and be a tribute to our collective commitment to the conservation of Africa's environment.

I thank you.