

-----CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY-----

Speech by Her Royal Highness Princess Irene van Lippe-Biesterfeld at the opening of Wild Wonders Europe, May 27, 2010, Den Haag

As patroness to the Year of Biodiversity I would like to take this opportunity offered me by the opening of the exhibition Wild Wonders of Europe, with its wonderful images of nature, to explore with you the meaning of the international Year of Biodiversity.

Why?

Because nature, through these photographs, demands our attention, love and solidarity. Nature that we are irreversibly damaging and exploiting. We live in the misunderstanding that it is all ours. The reality is that we are a part of nature, we actually are partners of nature.

By signing the Convention on Biological Diversity in Rio de Janeiro in 1993, we made a commitment to protect the biodiversity in our own country and that of the developing countries.

What is biodiversity, a term that only came into use in the '80's? It is more than just a crocus and cactus.....

Biodiversity is an all encompassing term to describe the variety of all life and natural processes on Earth.

The Convention on Biological Diversity defines biodiversity as "the variability among living organisms from all sources. This includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems." *Biodiversity embodies connection.* Therefore, it touches life itself, and that can never and should never be compartmentalized.

There are 4 million described forms of life; on estimation there are 50 million forms of life in total. What a wonderful earth we live in with such variety and diversity!

Why a Year of Biodiversity?

There are two clear reasons for devoting a whole year to Biodiversity: in the first place, because we have become so far removed from nature and so focused on our own well-being, that we no longer pay attention to all those forms of life that actually *make it possible* for us to live on this wonderfully beautiful planet earth.

In this light it is surprising that we recently learned that the Ministry of Development Cooperation has stopped subsidies to the ecosystem orientated organizations such as the IUCN, Solidaridad and the World Wildlife Fund. This decision goes against the Convention on Biological Diversity and the year in which we find ourselves.

The second reason for this Year of Biodiversity is that many forms of life are disappearing at an alarming rate. The more species that disappear, the bleaker life becomes for mankind.

We cannot and must not consider man and nature as two separate entities. We are part of nature and we urgently need to redefine our place in the natural world.

Even Amnesty International, the human rights organization, has taken a standpoint on biodiversity. I quote:

“Over the last few decades species are dying out faster than ever before. Due to the reduction in the number of plant species, animals are losing their source of food. Man is also dependent on a wide variety of species. Commercial interests threaten biodiversity. For example, it is a fact that large concerns have patents for certain crops *and* insecticides, which lead ultimately to the decline of other crops. It is possible that some crops die out because they have been superseded by “new” crops, often obtained by genetic manipulation. If, at a later date, it is apparent that the “new” crops are not resistant to certain diseases, it regularly occurs that the “old” crop cannot be found anymore. The construction of “seed banks” and the management of game parks, where animals threatened with extinction are protected, are examples of measures that are taken to maintain biodiversity.” Is it not a terrible that we create parks and seed banks and that we leave so little space for the non human forms of life?

Even I hear people saying that it's not all that bad, it could be worse, species have been dying out for centuries. Of course, they are right, but *that* was an organic process, it took place in a certain rhythm. What is now happening is completely different: according to the IUCN, the extinction of species is happening at a rate 1000 times faster than in the evolution without man. It is therefore man who is the motor behind this enormous acceleration of loss of species, through deforestation, cultivation, pollution, fertilization, land division and the increased CO2 emissions that have played a role in climate change. (Think of the plastic soup and the destruction of the magnificent coral through acidification of the oceans, think of the oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico with all the consequences it will have for plant, animal and mankind.)

The IUCN Red List of threatened species is the global barometer for the state of biodiversity. One out of five mammals are threatened with extinction; this is for primates more than half the population! For amphibians 30%, fish 37%, reptiles 31% and vascular plants it is 35% of the population.

Has it really not registered with us that the well-being of the earth and our own well-being go hand in hand?

Has it really not registered with us that the condition of nature mirrors the condition of man's soul? We are a part of the diversity of life on earth and, just as every other form of life, we have our own special place.

We, more than any other animal species, are in possession of a ratio that can oversee the consequences of our actions. This brings with it a responsibility to act clearly and adequately. Which means: not only to think of our own well-being but to also take the wellbeing of all life on earth into consideration, when making decisions and planning strategy.

What is more wonderful than that each one of us can contribute to the continuation of life on earth?

We live in a society characterized by an enormous work stress, that makes it almost impossible for us to take time out to reflect on how we live and how we want to, or plan to deal with this wonderful responsibility we have.

Our greed and our lack of time lead to a tension in our lives that leaves little room for anything else. It is never enough, it is never fast enough. Is there a point of no return before we destroy ourselves?

Don't we see that we cannot return to “business as usual” after the financial crisis, because this would be at the expense of the biodiversity and therefore also at our own expense.

Is it not first and foremost our duty to ensure the recovery of the Ecological Framework (de Ecologische Hoofdstructuur), the backbone of Dutch nature and landscape, in order to maintain the biodiversity in our country?

Let us be inspired to follow the example of those people and companies that *do* think of the well-being of all life on earth.

Take Natura 2000, the European Ecological Network. For the first time in human history we have constructed green corridors that connect nature areas to each other, so that animals and plants can freely migrate and disperse. It is a Dutch invention which we can be very proud of, but which we seem to give less priority in our own country.

My thoughts turn to the international study "The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB)". It is a major international initiative to draw attention to the global economic benefits of biodiversity, to highlight the growing costs of *biodiversity loss* and *ecosystem degradation*, and to draw together expertise from the fields of science, economics and policy to enable practical actions moving forward. The results of the study will be published in June of this year. This pioneering study shows how the loss of biodiversity will bring a great deal of expense to future generations. For example, the loss of one hectare of coral will cost the community an estimated 100.000-euro a year. If we take into account the expected decrease in tourism as a result, we are talking about a loss of 1 million euro a year.

The new association, the "Groene Zaak" (green business), comes to mind. This is a group of almost 50 enterprises with a joint ambition: to accelerate the process of the *Dutch economy becoming a sustainable economy*. We also have the *Leaders for Nature* initiative, whereby trade and industry get together with nature organizations to discuss *better ways of protecting our ecosystems*.

I think of the round table talks with representatives from the world of business, organized by the NatuurCollege, where we discuss from which world perspective we *can* live, work and produce in order to guarantee a sustainable future.

And I think of the children, who we are guiding in their discovery of the wonders of nature, through programme's such as NatuurWijs and Het Bewaarde Land.

You see, there is a lot happening already.....but of course not enough!

Take the time to recognize and rediscover the magic of the diversity of life that we share this planet earth with. Feel, smell, touch and listen.....so that you will once again feel a part of all life around you.

Realize that every decision each of us makes, can contribute to the wellbeing of all life on earth (biodiversity), *if* we see things in the perspective of connectedness. That means: do we think from the perspective of mankind alone, or can we expand our world perspective to include the well-being of all life on earth?

May this fine exhibition inspire us anew to think along these lines as it makes its journey through the cities of Europe.