



July 21, 2009

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton  
United States Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Senator John F. Kerry, Chairman  
Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
218 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Richard G. Lugar, Ranking Member  
Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
306 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Convention on Biological Diversity ratification

Dear Madame Secretary and Senators Kerry and Lugar:

One of the great challenges of today is to stem the extremely high rate of species extinctions and habitat loss currently devastating Earth's wondrous natural diversity. The 17 year-old Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is the only comprehensive agreement dedicated

to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. Only four nations in the world are not yet parties to the CBD: Andorra, Iraq, Somalia and the United States.

Although the United States has sent large delegations to each of the conferences of the parties to the CBD, our influence on the treaty's implementation is severely constrained by the fact that we are not a party. This not only impedes our ability to advance the conservation of global biodiversity, it also constrains our ability to participate in decisions with potentially major impacts on important sectors of our economy, such as pharmaceutical development. Thus, it is strongly in our national interest to become a party to the CBD. Accordingly, our organizations – with millions of American members committed to biodiversity conservation – now ask you to support U.S. ratification of this critical international agreement.

As you will recall, in 1993 President Clinton signed the CBD. He then transmitted it to the Senate for advice and consent along with “seven understandings” to accompany the ratification instrument. He noted that existing Federal, State and local laws and programs were “sufficient to enable any activities necessary to effectively implement our responsibilities under the Convention” and the “Administration does not intend to disrupt the existing balance of Federal and State authorities through the Convention”. In 1994 the Senate Foreign Relations Committee strongly supported CBD ratification by a 16-3 bipartisan vote, subject to the seven understandings. However, the full Senate failed to act on the CBD and has not revisited its ratification for 15 years. During this time, while virtually every other nation has become a party to the CBD, the United States has stood aside without a vote or official voice.

As with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which also awaits ratification, the United States stands starkly isolated as a non-party, harming our world image. We are encouraged by the administration's publicly-announced plan to urge the Senate to ratify UNCLOS and we believe CBD ratification would complement ratification of UNCLOS. Both the Pew Oceans Commission in 2003 and the President George W. Bush-appointed U.S. Commission on Oceans Policy in 2004 highlighted the role the CBD can play in protecting ocean life, beyond what UNCLOS alone can achieve.

Engaging in the CBD also will help address the severe threat of climate change. Conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and habitats such as the tropical forests – the Earth's “lungs” - are integral to slowing global warming. The CBD is an essential forum to ensure native plants and animals, as well as the interests of indigenous peoples, are fully considered in global warming mitigation and adaptation efforts.

In addition, the goals of the CBD directly support U.S. efforts to alleviate global poverty. About 70% of the world's poor live in rural areas and depend on biodiversity for their well-being. More than 3 billion people depend on marine and coastal resources and 1.6 billion people rely on forests and non-timber forest products for their livelihoods. Ensuring healthy ecosystems is crucial to poverty alleviation and sustainable development.

The appendix to this letter provides a number of compelling reasons for ratification. We urge you to consult with U.S. stakeholders, as we believe a broad spectrum of support for this treaty exists. Then we ask you to publicly support prioritization of CBD ratification. We would welcome the opportunity to offer our support however we can.

Sincerely,



Rodger Schlickeisen  
President and CEO  
Defenders of Wildlife



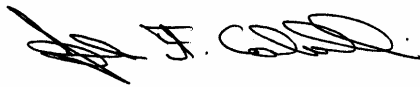
David Reed  
Senior Policy Advisor  
World Wildlife Fund



Brent Blackwelder  
President  
Friends of the Earth



Peter Seligmann  
Chairman and CEO  
Conservation International



John Calvelli  
Executive Vice President, Public Affairs  
Wildlife Conservation Society



William Snape  
Chairman Emeritus  
Endangered Species Coalition



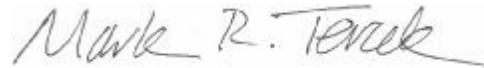
John Flicker  
President and CEO  
National Audubon Society



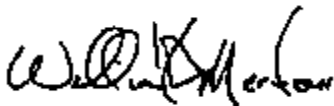
Kieran Suckling  
Executive Director  
Center for Biological Diversity



Daniel Magraw  
President  
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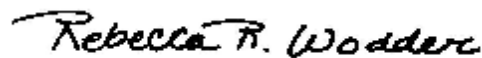
Mark Tercek  
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Rebecca R. Wodder  
President  
American Rivers

CC:

Richard Verma, Asst. Sec., Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs, State Department  
Christine Dawson, Focal Point for the CBD, State Department  
Maria Otero, Nominee for Under Secretary for Global Affairs  
Kerri-Ann Jones, Nominee for Asst. Sec., Oceans, Int'l Environment and Science Affairs

For further information please contact: Peter T. Jenkins, Director of International Conservation, Defenders of Wildlife, 1130 17<sup>th</sup> Ave., NW, Washington, DC; email: [pjenkins@defenders.org](mailto:pjenkins@defenders.org), tel: 202.772.0293

### **Appendix - Compelling Reasons for the United States to Ratify the CBD**

The CBD's effectiveness and the urgent cause of stemming the ongoing high rate of global biodiversity loss both suffer from the lack of involvement and support from the United States. Membership will allow U.S. official delegations to shape the world's approach to conservation and sustainable use. It will give the United States a real voice in a broad array of ongoing initiatives vital to conserving Earth's imperiled species and habitats.

Joining the CBD will signal a U.S. re-commitment to global environmental leadership and could markedly enhance our international relations. The CBD's consensus-based decision processes will ensure the interests of the United States are fully recognized, which they are not as a non-party. No party's national sovereignty has ever been undercut by joining or participating in the CBD.

The CBD's 24 work programs – ranging from agricultural biodiversity to forests, climate change to island issues, and plant conservation to ecotourism – set the agenda for key conservation and sustainable use activities around the world. U.S. environmental and industry groups have long seen the value of the CBD for their work and they actively contribute to its processes and implementation. For example, several major organizations participate in the CBD's protected areas work program, which sets goals for networks of protected areas, strengthens capacity and skills and provides recognized guidance on management of protected areas.

Industry groups and other stakeholders are very concerned with the CBD's ongoing negotiations on genetic resource and access and benefit-sharing (ABS). U.S. membership could significantly aid the molding of fair, workable ABS policies. Further, conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and habitats such as the tropical forests are integral to tackling the impacts of global warming. The CBD helps ensure Earth's native plants and animals and concerns of indigenous people are considered in negotiations over global warming mitigation and adaptation.

A few other notable CBD benefits: it fosters needed international coordination in addressing harmful invasive species; it is implementing a broadly-applauded Global Strategy for Plant Conservation; and it provides strong support for the vital, but neglected, scientific discipline of taxonomy. U.S. ratification and official engagement will enhance these benefits.