

PRESS RELEASE

MEMO – To ring a bell for biodiversity

Montreal, 21 May 2010. The International Year of Biodiversity is a wake up call for humanity. On 22 September Heads of State will assemble at the United Nations to discuss the biodiversity crisis. Simultaneously, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) will encourage the ringing of bells all over the world as an urgent ‘memo’ to rouse the world to action. The bells will also be rung each year on 22 May during celebration of the International Day for Biological Diversity.

This initiative is inspired by the UK based MEMO Project. MEMO is a collaboration of scientists and sculptors and stonemasons dedicated to communicating the reality of the extinction crisis by creating an ongoing memorial recording the carved images of all the species being lost. MEMO stands for Mass Extinction Memorial Observatory and the project enjoys high profile scientific support including the rarely bestowed endorsement of the Royal Society.

MEMO will be built on the cliffs of the Isle of Portland overlooking the sailing events of the London Olympics. This is part of the 'Jurassic Coast' World Heritage Site whose 95 miles of fossil rich cliffs already record 185 million continuous years of the history of life, including two of the 'big five' mass extinctions of the geological past. In the middle of the monument will be a great bell to be tolled whenever a species is assessed as extinct from now on.

In preparation, a bell was cast in 2009 directly from a mould of Portland limestone, the fossiliferous ground of the island, and so quite literally, from the fossils of ancient extinct species. The United Nations building in New York is faced with the same Portland stone. On 22 September the bell will be rung in New York echoed by others around the world.

Meanwhile, at Royal Manor School on Portland, on Saturday 22 May, the International Day for Biological Diversity, stonemasons are making a start on shaping the mould for the big bell nearly 10 feet in diameter. The aim is to cast it this year. At the same time in Nairobi, Kenya, a second MEMO bell will form part of the global celebrations taking place with participation of the government and people of Kenya, the international community and United Nations. Students from Kianjagi High School – the twin of Royal Manor – will take part in the event.

Notes to Editors:

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and entering into force in December 1993, the Convention on Biological Diversity is an international treaty for the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of the components of biodiversity and the equitable sharing of the benefits derived from the use of genetic resources. With 193 Parties, the Convention has near universal participation among countries. The Convention seeks to address all threats to biodiversity and ecosystem services, including threats from climate change, through scientific assessments, the development of tools, incentives and processes, the transfer of technologies and good practices and the full and active involvement of relevant stakeholders including indigenous and local communities, youth, NGOs, women and the business community. The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, a supplementary treaty to the Convention, seeks to protect biological diversity from the potential risks posed by living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology. To date, 156 countries and the European Union are party to the Protocol. The Secretariat of the Convention and its Cartagena Protocol is located in Montreal. For more information visit www.cbd.int

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MEMO

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