

M. S. SWAMINATHAN  
Honorary Director

Reply to :  
11, Rathna Nagar  
Teynampet  
Madras 600 018, INDIA  
Telephone : (044) 455339

17 November 1989

My dear Shri Mahesh Prasad:

I am very sorry for the delay in replying to your letter No. J.18013/24/87-IC dated September 12, 1989. I have also received a reminder from Shri. K. Madhava Sharma. My views on the papers sent by you are given below:

- 1] There is little doubt that there is an urgent need for every country developing an effective and integrated strategy for the conservation and sustainable management of biological diversity. As pointed out in the UNEP-IUCN papers enclosed with your letter, such an integrated Biodiversity Conservation Strategy should pay concurrent attention to the preservation of diversity at the genetic, species and eco-system levels. It should pay attention to the conservation of both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. It is for this purpose that the Steering Group on Environment for the VIII Plan set up by the Planning Commission has proposed the immediate setting up of a National Board for Biological Diversity. Such a Board can be assisted in the determination of priorities by the Indira Gandhi Conservation Monitoring Centre which is being developed by WWF-India with your kind support. I shall be grateful if you would kindly take steps to set up the National Board for Biological Diversity soon.
- 2] The most controversial element in the global debate on biological diversity relates to the potential impact of gene patenting, Plant Breeders' Rights and other intellectual property rights regarding biological diversity as a common heritage of humankind. Industrialised countries take the basic genetic material from developing countries and then get the new genetic combinations produced either through conventional breeding or through genetic engineering patented. Developing countries, which part with the basic material free, will have to get modified versions of the same material only on payment of royalty. There is thus no equity in the exchange of germplasm. Without equity in sharing the benefits of biological diversity, there will be difficulty in promoting

the sharing of biological wealth. Therefore, the issues raised in Para 9 of the report of the Adhoc Group of Experts are extremely important. In this context, the FAO Commission on Plant Genetic Resources, set up when I was Independent Chairman of the FAO Council, has recommended the acceptance of the concept of **Farmers' Rights**, to protect the rights of the farmers of the Third World who are responsible for saving for posterity the fruits of thousands of years of natural evolution and human selection. In this context, I enclose the proceedings of the first Keystone Dialogue on Plant Genetic Resources held last year under my chairmanship. The next Dialogue will be held in Madras from January 29 to February 2, 1990.

3] I suggest the following action :

a) We support in principle the need for a Global convention on the conservation, **sustainable management and equitable use** of biological diversity for achieving sustained advances in biological productivity.

b) We recommend the following measures at the UN level

i) Set up a UN Commission on Planet Protection.

ii) Organise a Planet Protection Fund on the lines proposed by our Prime Minister.

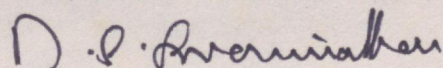
iii) Set up a UN Advisory Committee on Planet Protection with a standing sub-committee on Biological Diversity and

iv) Utilise a suitable proportion of the Planet Protection Fund for helping developing countries both to conserve and utilise their biological wealth, on the recommendations of the standing sub-committee on Biological Diversity.

4] Unfortunately, all the Secretariats of global conventions dealing with environmental issues are in developed countries. We should suggest their dispersal. We may offer to host the Secretariat for the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, if such a convention is developed incorporating the features mentioned in Para 3.

With warm personal regards,

Yours sincerely,



**M.S. SWAMINATHAN**

**Shri. Mahesh Prasad**  
Secretary to the Govt. of India  
Ministry of Environment & Forests  
NEW DELHI

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the sharing of biological wealth. Therefore, the issues raised in Para 9 of the report of the Adhoc Group of Experts are extremely important. In this context, the FAO Commission on Plant Genetic Resources, set up when I was Independent Chairman of the FAO Council, has recommended the acceptance of the concept of Farmers' Rights, to protect the rights of the farmers of the Third World who are responsible for saving for posterity the fruits of thousands of years of natural evolution and human selection. In this context, I enclose the proceedings of the first Keystone Dialogue on Plant Genetic Resources held last year under my chairmanship. The next Dialogue will be held in Madras from January 29 to February 2, 1990.

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With warm personal regards

Shri. Matesh Prasad,  
Secretary to the Government  
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Ministry of Environment and Forests

Yours sincerely  
L. M. S. Swaminathan