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"Keep biodiversity or face hunger"

Special Correspondent

— Photo: S.S. Kumar



Union Minister of State for Environment and Forests Jairam Ramesh (right) with M.S. Swaminathan, Chairman of MSSRF, at an international conference on biodiversity in Chennai on Wednesday.

CHENNAI: Top scientists and policymakers from leading national and international institutes on Wednesday issued a declaration calling on all nations to prioritise conservation of the earth's multitude of plant, agricultural, forest and marine species or risk widespread hunger and accelerating climate change.

Biodiverse ecosystems, they stressed, contain naturally evolved genetic strengths and unique food technologies developed by traditional communities in different climates, soils and temperatures. Harnessing and sharing these capabilities equitably will help humanity adapt to rising temperatures and the poorest of the poor feed themselves in harsh climates.

To that end, the Chennai Declaration set out a series of strategies that are the product of three days of intense discussion, at the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, of the senior representatives from organisations across the world such as the UN Environment Programme, the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation, the International Rice Research Institute, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the World Food Prize Fund, and India's National Biodiversity Authority and Ministry of Environment and Forests.

"The declaration makes a bridge of issues at global, national and local levels between the challenges for conservation and food security," said Angela Cropper, Deputy Executive Director, UN Environment Programme.

These include: according economic value to the services nature and

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agriculture rendered and setting up mechanisms for payment for such services; acknowledging that the custodians of biodiverse resources are farmers and fisherfolk; finding markets for neglected but nutritious crops; including rural communities in biodiversity strategies; refocussing research and development priorities and promoting biodiversity literacy through public education to build an ethic of conservation.

Jairam Ramesh, Union Minister of State for Environment and Forests, present at the valedictory session, pledged to take forward the “wonderful ideas” contained in the declaration. He said he would do his best to integrate climate change mitigation strategies with biodiversity conservation in both national policy and in international discussion in Mexico later this year. 2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity.

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