

Ministerial Conference: Nature Protection in the Caucasus
Promoting Transboundary Cooperation for CBD Implementation
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Opening Speech

Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development -
Germany

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The dramatic increase in natural disasters over the past two years is strengthening the new German government in its resolve to view environmental and nature protection – our very lifeline – as a matter of paramount concern. The conservation of natural resources has been deemed an integral component of sustainable development policy, especially since the UN Earth Summit in Rio in 1992. Lasting poverty reduction in developing countries cannot be achieved without protecting nature and securing the foundations on which livelihoods are built. There are no alternatives to the international conventions that commit their signatories to the conservation of the environment, nature and biological diversity.

On the international stage, Germany is a trailblazer when it comes to nature protection. Ever since German development cooperation began almost 50 years ago, we have been concerned in a large number of countries with establishing national parks, preserving tropical forests, employing renewable energies and using natural resources in a sustainable manner. Since ecosystems and migratory animal species know no national borders, nature protection demands regional cooperation. This can be illustrated by way of the Caucasus region. All six countries comprising the region are parties to the international Convention on Biological Diversity.

In the mid 1990s Germany began its support for the Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park in Georgia. During my visit to Georgia in 2001, I had the honour of officially inaugurating the park. Its exemplary management and land use plan, which was prepared with the participation of the local population, serve as a model for the entire region.

In order to promote regional cooperation in this area, I launched the Caucasus Initiative of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in 2001. One of its cornerstones addresses nature protection, a field in which transnational cooperation has proved particularly successful. A long-term sector strategy for all six countries of the Caucasus already exists in the form of the Ecoregional Conservation Plan (ECP). Our cooperation with German and international non-governmental organisations is also highly effective in this region.

In the meantime, it has proved necessary to set up a sustainable trust fund in order to secure ongoing funding for conservation areas in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The BMZ has provided five million euros as initial capital and hopes to see keen participation by other donors and institutions.

Our Caucasus Initiative aims to foster peaceful development in the region. To this end, we have selected areas of activity that produce results benefiting all parties. We are aware of the unique biodiversity of the Caucasus and feel committed to preserving this gift of nature to humankind for posterity.

Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul,
German Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development