

Avoiding a drastic reduction in biodiversity

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Hundreds of animal and plant species are becoming extinct around the world. The rich and diverse biological system that is Planet Earth is under severe threat due to the irresponsible human exploitation of its riches. This has finally led to a growing awareness of the fragility and danger to the Earth's biological resources. Many organizations - such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) - have been formed with the aim of protecting these resources, promoting sustainable development and implementing programmes to protect the world's plant and animal life.

I am writing here of something that should be a priority in all Muslim countries since Islam views the world as a trust given by God to mankind. How we humans handle this trust is something for which we will be answerable to God in the hereafter.

The protection of animal and plant life in the wild is something to which a great deal of attention is now rightly devoted. I want to bring to your notice something about which there is far less awareness but which is also important: The protection of domestic animals and plants. What I am referring to are those animals and plants we breed and cultivate in order to produce our food, use their fibers and their skins. With the rise of industrial farming there has been a corresponding decrease in the variety of animal and plant breeds that are used in

that kind of farming.

This has resulted in a drastic reduction in the variety of animals and plants in the world. In other words, unless we take some action now, we may end up with only five kinds of wheat and two breeds of cows; all other types and breeds will have become extinct due to neglect or concentration exclusively on the breeds best suited for industrial farming.

One special danger of such a drastic reduction in biodiversity is that a disease to which a particular breed of cattle is susceptible may wipe out that breed completely. We would then be left with no other type to crossbreed with or replace it with. This could have catastrophic results. Something of this sort happened in France many years ago when many of their vineyards were destroyed by disease and had to be replaced by different types of grapes brought from America.

The matter becomes even more serious because of the practice of genetic engineering in which an increasing number of plant and animal species are being genetically modified with unknown consequences.

Thus I call upon the world governments to develop special farms for local breeds of domestic animals such as sheep, goats and camels and plants such as wheat, barley and rye.

These will be stores for genetic traits that may be of vital importance in the future.