

# CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (RAMSAR, IRAN, 1971)

## 26TH MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE

### OPENING STATEMENT

**by Achim Steiner, Director General of IUCN**

(delivered by J-Y. Pirot, Wetlands and Water Resources Programme, on 5 December 2001)

Mr Chairman,  
Mr Secretary General  
Members of the Standing Committee,  
National Delegates,  
Colleagues and Friends,

- Because today's Opening conflicts with the Reuters-IUCN Media Award for Environmental Journalists, a ceremony chaired by the Patron of IUCN, Her Majesty Queen Noor of Jordan, I am here representing the Director General of IUCN, Achim Steiner, who sends his apologies and greetings to this 26th meeting of the Ramsar Standing Committee.
- On his behalf, I am pleased to extend these words of welcome to the Members of the Standing Committee and to the Observers present in this room.
- IUCN feels very privileged to host another meeting of one of the most successful environmental treaties. We recognise and compliment the Ramsar Convention for its wisdom and courage in clearly and practically addressing important technical challenges for which IUCN and its members are also trying to find new ways forward, working parallel to the Convention. A very good example is the work on addressing change in ecological character and livelihoods due to global warming or infrastructure development.
- We also praise the Ramsar Convention for its very special ability to engage the other part of IUCN, our NGO community, in its work. On the one hand, the Ramsar Convention has become a lead adviser to the CBD, the UN Commission on Sustainable Development and other UN bodies. On the other hand, it continues to provide a technical platform for an open and fruitful dialogue among volunteer scientists and experts the world over.
- It is therefore a great pleasure for us to notice that the work done by the NGO partners during this triennium continues to be consistently reflected in the documents in front of you. We are confident that COP8 will be another celebration of the benefits of nurturing a strong tradition of collaboration between governments and NGOs.
- In order to give fuller exposure to all the work accomplished by the Convention in the past 10 years, IUCN would like to disseminate the results achieved by Ramsar in the international debate, especially on the occasion of the forthcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg.

- At WSSD, IUCN plans to list wetlands and water resources among the themes chosen to highlight progress made in the way critical ecosystems should be managed for both poverty alleviation and biodiversity. Wetlands and river basins are not discrete ecological units, but rather cut across boundaries from upland to lowland, and terrestrial to marine, linking the upstream and downstream users and the States of shared river basins. This is why Ramsar has such a beneficial role to play in overcoming national interests and ensuring regional or international cooperation.
- The success of Ramsar is becoming more and more apparent. For example, consider the international partnership that is being established to restore estuarine Ramsar sites on both sides of the Senegal river, where the border between Mauritania and Senegal was closed 10 years ago or so. Another example is the partnership between southern African and European countries aimed at producing a regional management plan for the Okavango delta, the largest Ramsar site in the world. These are simple and clear examples of how an environmental agreement on wetlands and water resources management can support effective conservation.
- Hence, we strongly hope that "Rio + 10" will be a watershed for renewed cooperation with your Convention. To achieve this, IUCN colleagues have compiled a report, which summarises the past and present support provided by many IUCN programmes and units to the Joint Work Plan between the CBD and Ramsar. We have prepared this report, which is available on the table at this side of the room, in the hope that the Bureau and many Parties will advise us on how IUCN could provide better and more strategic support to Ramsar and the CBD, in the run-up to WSSD, your own COP8 and thereafter. Based on the description of the support delivered on different subjects, we need now to identify key delivery areas in relation to the Strategic Plan that you will hopefully approve for finalisation at this meeting.
- More practically, as for COP7 in Costa Rica, IUCN stands ready to contribute, as requested, to the official and unofficial programmes of the Ramsar Conference in Valencia, Spain. We will use several of our component programmes and our new Mediterranean Office in Malaga, and will also work with the IUCN Spanish Committee and those Spanish members and NGO partners who will join forces to coorganise the Global Biodiversity Forum.

Mr Chairman, Delegates and Colleagues,

- Not only does IUCN share the same building with Ramsar, we also share the same hopes. We therefore wish you all success in the coming days. We are confident that this gathering will contribute effectively to the programme of the next Ramsar COP, which promises to be a challenging one given that it will be effectively the first post-Johannesburg Conference of Parties of any environmental convention.

Thankyou.