



CONVENTION ON WETLANDS
CONVENTION SUR LES ZONES HUMIDES
CONVENCIÓN SOBRE LOS HUMEDALES
(Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

The Convention on Wetlands, signed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971, is an intergovernmental treaty which provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. There are presently 144 Contracting Parties to the Convention, with 1414 wetland sites, totaling 123.8 million hectares, designated under the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance (also called Ramsar sites). The Convention's mission is the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local, regional and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world (Ramsar Conference Of the Parties 8, 2002).

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Media release

Beyond the tsunami

Scientists and international organizations agree on principles for the mitigation of natural disasters.

Gland, Switzerland, 3rd February 2005 (Ramsar Convention Secretariat) - Wetland scientists and nine intergovernmental organizations put forward a set of recommendations on how to improve the management of natural ecosystems to mitigate natural disasters.

"The tsunami in Southeast Asia was an emotional shock for the world and we have to capitalize on it to make sure nothing similar will happen again", said Mr. Philippe Roch, Director of the Federal Office for the Environment, Forests and Landscape of Switzerland.

In its aim to reduce the impacts of future natural disasters, the declaration calls for increased conservation efforts of coastal ecosystems, integration of risk assessments in coastal zone planning and land use, involvement of local communities in ecosystem restoration, and increased international cooperation on natural resource management.

Participants especially stressed the need for healthy mangroves and other coastal ecosystems, which can mitigate the impacts of natural disasters. Evidence from Cuba and the Caribbean, Meso and South America and Asia shows that coastal ecosystems reduce the strength and dissipate the energy of extreme events, leading to less damage and loss of life.

The declaration also calls special attention to the contribution of coastal ecosystems to the health and livelihoods of coastal communities. Ecosystem restoration, improved land use management and coastal zone planning must not only aim to mitigate disasters in future, but also aim to provide economic, social and cultural benefits.

With regard to the reconstruction efforts in Southeast Asia, this also requires the involvement of local communities in ecosystem management to identify those priority actions that improve their livelihoods. The experts identified the ecosystem approach as appropriate, as it allows improved management of coastal ecosystems with special attention to people's needs for natural resources.

The declaration appoints the Ramsar Convention as the lead agency to promote international and inter-institutional cooperation during and after the recovery phase to avoid duplicating work and wasting money.

After the experts drafted the declaration, Mr. Roch was invited by Mr. Peter Bridgewater, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention, to become the Ambassador of the declaration worldwide, and received the first Ramsar Award medal, as recognition for his work and commitment to the conservation and wise use of wetlands and water resources.

Pictures of the debate and the ceremony available at: ssg@ramsar.org

The full text of the declaration as well as more information on the Ramsar Convention can be found at: www.ramsar.org