



World Wetlands Day is almost upon us, and I know that many of you are already preparing materials and activities at international, national and local levels. Our theme of 'wetlands and tourism' is undoubtedly one of the most popular one we've had to date, and we've been heartened by the enthusiastic responses we've had since the announcement of the theme last year. We are confident that this will lead to more World Wetlands Day activities than ever and thus increased awareness about the Convention and especially about wetland wise use and sustainable tourism.

In 2010 the number of international tourists reached something like 940 million, and that figure is predicted by the UN World Tourism Organization to grow to around 1.6 billion by 2020 – that does not even count the significant numbers of domestic tourists or the many people who make short recreational trips. Since about half of these international tourists travel to wetlands of all types, it is clear that for the Ramsar Convention the reality is that tourism in wetlands is here to stay and will continue to grow. There are many examples of sustainable tourism in wetlands and ample evidence that income from tourism can bring substantial benefits for wetlands, local communities, and local and national governments. Unfortunately there are just as many examples of how uncontrolled, unsustainable tourism can negatively impact upon wetlands, their wildlife, their natural splendour and the ecosystem services wetlands provide for human populations, and we don't believe that it has to be that way.

In preparing our materials for World Wetlands Day this year, we have joined forces with the expertise of the UN World Tourism Organization, and we hope that, in planning your WWD activities this year, you have found our contributions helpful. Please use this opportunity to focus on key stakeholders who can help to ensure that tourism in your wetlands is sustainable and that any tourism development in and around wetlands in the future is carried out following Ramsar's principles of wise use.

We have already received some customizations of our materials by users around the world, and we know there are many more on the way. Such efforts are extremely helpful in making our World Wetlands Day message relevant and beneficial for your stakeholders and your wetlands, and we look forward to hearing more from you about this.

Ramsar's engagement on the issue of wetlands and sustainable tourism will not end with World Wetlands Day, and I encourage you to look at our materials to find out more about the further developments expected later this year and how these will help the Convention to formally address the challenges of achieving sustainable tourism in and around wetlands.

We wish you an excellent World Wetlands Day 2012, and please do let us know afterwards about how it went for you this year.

Anada Tiéga
Secretary General
Ramsar Convention on Wetlands