



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 138 Contracting Parties to the Convention, with 1328 wetland sites, totaling 111.9 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).

### **Key facts and figures...**

- ✓ Less than 1% of the Earth's water resources are freshwater.
- ✓ 20% of the world has no access to safe drinking water and 50% does not have sanitation.
- ✓ Waterborne diseases kill between 5 and 10 million people each year.
- ✓ It takes 2000 liters of water to produce 1Kg of rice.
- ✓ 50% of the world's wetlands were lost during the last century.
- ✓ Over 700 freshwater species are currently on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.
- ✓ Wetlands produce an estimated value of US\$ 3.4 billions each year, according to a recent WWF report.
- ✓ Hydropower provides 20% of the energy worldwide.
- ✓ The Mekong River produces US\$ 1,2 billion worth of fish every year.
- ✓ A wetland in Canada (Congaree Bottomland Hardwood Swamp) delivers the same services as a US\$ 5 million purifying plant would.

## **Media Release**

### **Towards a new water management scheme?...** *The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands appears like the most likely international treaty to deal with the water issue, Peter Bridgewater says.*

**Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, February, 9th 2004 (Ramsar Convention Secretariat):** The 7th Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity started today with the opening statements. The Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971) was invited, as a key partner of the CBD, to participate in the opening remarks.

***A global management scheme is necessary.*** Peter Bridgewater, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention, stressed the necessity for a management scheme for global water resources: *"There is thus a necessity for a more co-ordinated global management of water resources - and the Ramsar Convention appears as the most relevant existing international agreement to deal with this new and increasing responsibility"*

**Wetlands: vital ecosystems.** Water is important for wetlands and biodiversity, especially water birds, but it's also, and more than everything else, vital for human development. Wetlands play a key role in producing, purifying and protecting water resources. Wetlands are natural flood control systems, they replenish groundwater resources, they stabilize seashores and are a natural protection against storms. They play a key role in retaining and exporting sediments and nutrients but also in mitigating the effects of climate change and other global changes. Besides being important sites for biodiversity they are also sources of foods and other products for human needs, beside their cultural and recreational values. Wetlands are, thus, key elements in human development and poverty alleviation, and their correct management is an imperative in achieving sustainable development.

***Water: a resource at risk.*** Originally created to preserve wetlands as a vital habitat for waterfowl, the Ramsar Convention was the first international treaty to promote an integrated management of ecosystems: the wise use principle. Similar to the CBD's developing ecosystem approach, the wise use principle recommends an integrated vision of ecosystems, including not only biological or ecological factors, but also human, social, cultural, economic and institutional dimensions, among others. With the evolution of the Ramsar Convention, the water issue has become an increasingly important focus where the wise use principle or the ecosystem approach can make a difference. *"The challenge is to find ways of securing appropriate allocation of water to wetlands in the face of increasing water demand and diminishing water supply through over- abstraction and the effects of prolonged and increasing droughts and desertification in many parts of the world"*.

**A new focus for Ramsar.** Since the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 2002), it has become clear that water is one of the most important resource of the planet yet also one of the most under stress. Following an initiative from the Swiss Federal Government, the Ramsar Convention has decided to broaden its perspective and deal more with the resource use in addition to biodiversity aspects. This new focus integrates the human and social aspects of water management, shifting the Convention's view **from "wetlands for birds" to "water for people"**. The idea is to ensure water resources and their correct management not only for ecological purposes, but also for human development: *"Right now the world is poised to cope with the issue of ensuring enough freshwater for all – which means ensuring enough water for wetlands and other ecosystems, but integrating also human needs around the world"*.

**Strengthening partnerships.** *Dealing with the water issue will require a global approach to management, but also strong partnerships with the existing environmental conventions. The CBD, as the central international agreement dealing with this issue is, of course, one of the key partners, together with other UN conventions and programmes (UNFCCC, UNCCD, etc.). Synergies between the Ramsar Convention and the CBD already exist and have proved their usefulness, but these partnerships will have to be strengthened and broadened in order to be successful: "Linkage and synergy with other conventions is essential – and there is no convention with which we have more connection than the CBD. Yet even here we need to move beyond being seen simply as providing advice and expertise and help in developing a joint programme on inland waters".*

*Note: All the statements published in this document have been made by Peter Bridgewater, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention, during his opening statement at the 7<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity.*

*The new focus of the Ramsar Convention will be presented in details during a side event on Friday, 13<sup>th</sup> at 13h15.*  
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