



**Regional Technical Meeting on Implementation
of the Ramsar Convention in the Arab Region
22-25 June 2009, Cairo**



**Cairo Statement
Conclusions and Recommendations**

1. The Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the United Nations Environment Programme – Regional Office West Asia (UNEP-ROWA) and the League of Arab States (LAS), jointly organized a ‘Regional Technical Meeting on Implementation of the Ramsar Convention in the Arab Region’ from 22 to 25 June, 2009 at the headquarters of the League of Arab States in Cairo, Egypt. The meeting was attended by representatives of the Arab countries, as well as from a number of concerned regional and international organizations.
2. According to the Ramsar Convention, wetlands include lakes and swamps, rivers, salt lakes in arid areas, coastal areas (including coral reefs, mangrove and sea-grass beds), artificial wetlands, oasis and wadis, etc. Such ecosystems are found throughout the Arab world and provide through their rich flora and fauna biodiversity and through vital ecological services that support the livelihood and well-being of significant human populations. Accordingly, the sustainable management and development of wetland ecosystems represent a key priority in the Arab region, both at the national and regional levels. This is well reflected in the fact that 16 of the 22 countries of the Arab region (as of 10 January 2009), are members to the Ramsar Convention, not to mention their affiliation with other MEAs and other regional instruments/initiatives.
3. In recognition of the important role of wetlands in supporting the well being of significant human populations in the Arab region, the Convention aims to provide participants with basic principles of the wise use of wetland concepts and initiate a regional plan of action to enhance the implementation of the Ramsar Convention. The specific objectives of the meeting included the review of the significance of wetlands in supporting sustainable development of the Arab region, identifying the challenges and opportunities for the wise use of wetlands, and developing a regional framework strategy on the way forward.
4. The opening ceremony of the meeting included speeches by the Egyptian Minister of Environment, UNEP-ROWA, Ramsar Convention Secretariat and LAS Secretariat. Over 70 participants from the member countries of the LAS attended the meeting, including experts from specialized regional and international organizations and initiatives.
5. Arab country representatives gave updates on the current status of their wetlands and the activities that are being conducted to implement the Convention. Presentations were also given by the regional and international organizations and initiatives, on the activities they are conducting towards achieving the goals of the Ramsar Convention.
6. The discussions and outcomes of the working groups formed during the meeting focused on developing regional priorities and a regional framework strategy for implementation of the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2009 - 2015 and the Changwon Declaration endorsed by COP10 held in Changwon, R.O. Korea from 28 October - 4 November 2008.

7. Accordingly, the following conclusions/ recommendations were agreed upon as a road map/ framework strategy on the way forward for achieving the sustainable management of wetlands and enhancing the implementation of Ramsar Convention in the region:

GOAL 1. Wise Use: To work towards achieving the wise use of all wetlands by ensuring that all Arab countries develop, adopt and use the necessary and appropriate instruments and measures, with the participation of the local indigenous and non-indigenous population and making use of traditional knowledge, while at the same time ensuring that conservation and wise use of wetlands contribute to poverty eradication, mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, as well as prevention of disease and of natural disasters.

- 1.1 Assess and monitor wetlands, and to develop national and regional databases in order to inform the implementation of the Convention, in particular in the application of its provisions concerning the wise use of all wetlands.
- 1.2 Develop and implement policies, legislation, and practices in all countries of the region, to ensure the wise use of wetlands.
- 1.3 Increase recognition by decision-makers of the importance of wetlands.
- 1.4 Promote successful implementation of the wise use principle by ensuring that national policies and wetland management plans are based on the best available scientific knowledge, including technical and traditional knowledge.
- 1.5 Ensure that policies and implementation of Integrated Water Resources Management and ecosystem- and catchment-based approaches are included in the planning activities of all countries and in their decision-making processes.
- 1.6 Identify priority wetlands where restoration would be beneficial and yield long-term environmental, social, or economic benefits, and implement the necessary measures to recover these sites and systems.
- 1.7 Promote the involvement of the private sector and NGOs in the conservation and wise use of wetlands.

GOAL 2. Wetlands of International Importance To develop and maintain regional and national networks of wetlands that are important for sustaining human life and the conservation of global biological diversity, especially populations of migratory species.

- 2.3 Encourage member states to place more Wetlands of International Importance onto the Ramsar List, and maintain effective management planning of all new Ramsar sites before designation, as well as resources for implementing such management.
- 2.4 Assess and monitor the condition of Ramsar sites, especially those in conflict areas, and notify the Ramsar Secretariat of changes affecting those sites, and apply the Montreux Record and Ramsar Advisory Mission, if appropriate, as tools to address problems.
- 2.5 Implement appropriate management and wise use of internationally important wetlands that have not yet been formally designated as Ramsar sites but have been identified through domestic application of the *Strategic Framework* or an equivalent process.

GOAL 3. International cooperation. To enhance the conservation and wise use of wetlands using effective international cooperation, through *inter alia* the active application of the *Guidelines for international cooperation under the Ramsar Convention*.

- 3.1 Strengthen cooperation with international and, regional multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), initiatives, intergovernmental agencies and other partners.

- 3.2 Solicit regional support for the conservation and wise use of wetlands, through ensuring that environmental safeguards and assessments are an integral component of all related development projects.
- 3.3 Promote regional and south-to-south sharing of expertise and information on the conservation and wise use of wetlands.
- 3.4 Encourage cooperation for the management of shared/ transboundary wetlands and hydrological basins, including cooperative monitoring and management of shared wetland-dependent species.

GOAL 4. Institutional capacity/ effectiveness: Progress towards fulfillment of the Convention's mission by ensuring required mechanisms, resources, and capacity to do so.

- 4.1 Support the implementation of the Convention's Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness (CEPA) Programme for promoting conservation and wise use of wetlands through CEPA activities and programmes, and by the use of such materials produced in Arabic.
- 4.2 Establish an Arabic regional network on wetlands to enhance coordination between the members of the Arab region for the implementation of the Convention.
- 4.3 Strengthen Arab group participation in the Convention through the establishment of a regional network and conducting necessary meetings, consultations on issues to the region.
- 4.4 Coordinate and support capacity building through development and implementation of suitable training programmes for better implementation of the Convention.
- 4.5 Increase the Convention body's effectiveness in the region by adopting Arabic as one of its official languages.

GOAL 5. Membership: To progress towards universal membership of the Convention.

- 5.1 Encourage all non-Party Arab region countries to become a member of the Convention in order to benefit from the opportunities provided and to ensure the wise use of their wetland ecosystems.

The participants also called on Ramsar Convention Secretariat, UNEP-ROWA, the LAS and other concerned international and regional organizations/ initiatives and donors, to develop a programme of work to address and implement the above recommendations, including regional meetings and capacity building activities, as well as an Arab preparatory meeting prior to the holding of Ramsar COP11 in 2012.

Finally, the meeting thanked the organizers and the donors for their generous support into making the meeting such a success.