

Agenda item 7

Theme of COP10

Background document to assist in the discussion of point 2 in the agenda of the Subgroup on COP10, submitted by the Republic of Korea.

1. The Republic of Korea was selected as the host country of the 10th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP10) to the Convention on Wetlands at COP9 held in Kampala, Uganda, in November 2005. This document describes our consideration of possible themes so far, and presents three candidate themes for discussion by the subgroup, with a view to selecting one for consideration by Standing Committee 35.
2. Fully recognizing the importance of selecting themes which would reflect not only international trends on wetland conservation, but also the major interests of both Asian countries and Korea, we reviewed the agenda items discussed at the previous COPs and other international fora.
3. In the consultation process from August to November in 2006, we made discussions on COP10 themes with relevant Korean government agencies, the Ramsar Secretariat, wetlands experts, NGOs, and interested parties in the Asian region.
 - The Ramsar Secretariat proposed five theme candidates which have received attention at the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands: Human Health and Wetlands; Transboundary Wetlands; Urban Wetlands; Wetlands and Climate Change; and Achieving the 2010 Biodiversity Target.
 - We made contact with regional experts in formal and informal ways and confirmed that Asian countries have been interested in three issues: the joint conservation of transboundary wetlands; the relationship between wetlands and natural disaster mitigation; and the functions of paddy fields as wetlands.
 - We also had meetings at the domestic level with relevant government agencies, wetland experts and NGOs and mainly discussed the concern about the loss of wetlands caused by reckless development, and the importance of wetland/river basin management. We shared our views that the efforts to conserve wetlands were not limited to wetland protection and wildlife habitat conservation but included the preservation of ecosystems associated with wetlands.
4. As a result of these consultations, we selected three theme candidates, “Wetlands and Peace,” “Wetlands and Human Health,” and the “Conservation of Transboundary Wetlands.” These candidates will be presented to the 35th meeting of the Standing Committee for discussion.

Theme Candidates

Wetlands and Peace: Harmony and Coexistence between Humans and Nature

5. In general, peace refers to the absence of conflicts between nations and between humans. We intend to apply this concept to the overall biosphere, pursuing harmony and coexistence between humans and Nature.
6. The development of wetlands in an unsustainable manner has resulted in the loss of wildlife habitats/biodiversity and has also affected human life, consequently posing threats to coexistence between humans and Nature.
7. Against this backdrop, the theme puts priority on the future relationship between humans and Nature, and it is also a major concern of Korean NGOs.

Wetlands and Human Health

8. This theme reflects the reality that wetlands have long been regarded as useless wastelands and breeding grounds for diseases such as malaria. It also recognizes a growing concern that wild waterbirds and wetlands have a possible intermediary role in the transmission of Avian Influenza (AI).
9. Furthermore, it also gives prominence to the positive functions and value of wetlands in human life as sources of clean water and food.
10. Currently, the theme has emerged as one of the most important issues in the Ramsar Secretariat and the Contracting Parties. It also has relevance to other issues including natural disaster mitigation, wetlands conservation in urban areas, and poverty reduction.

Conservation of Transboundary Wetlands

11. Many wetlands of international importance are located in border zones of adjoining countries. Because of their obvious trans-boundary connectivity, these shared wetlands are often hard to manage with individual national approaches alone. Therefore, each country's efforts and international cooperation are both required to effectively manage transboundary wetlands.
12. Furthermore, of greater concern are the conflicts between countries and between regions that border and share wetlands. Such conflicts are largely associated with access to natural resources including clean water and with water pollution control and sustainable water utilization. Therefore, it is also closely related to the first theme, "Wetlands and Peace."
13. In particular, the theme is one of the key issues in which Asian countries are interested.