



CONVENTION ON WETLANDS

(Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

World Habitat Day 5 October 2009

“Planning our Urban Future,” the theme of World Habitat Day this year, is an especially welcome focus for the Contracting Parties of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. The challenges and opportunities for the continued conservation and wise use of the world’s wetlands in light of the increasing spread of urbanization and related resource and population pressures have been the focus of much interest and concern for us.

In Resolution X.27 adopted at our recent Conference of the Parties in Changwon, Republic of Korea, in November 2008, the Ramsar Parties noted that since prehistoric times human settlements have been established near wetlands, for a number of reasons, including their resources, trade and transportation, defensive potential, and so on. At the same time, however, the Parties expressed their concern that, with rapidly increasing urbanization, many wetlands in urban and peri-urban environments are becoming degraded through encroachment of surrounding populations, pollution, poorly managed waste and infilling or other developments, and that these activities have diminished both the ecosystem services that urban wetlands can provide and the recognition of their value and importance by decision-makers.

The Parties also noted that the spread of urbanization is leading to wetlands, including Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance, that were formerly in rural areas becoming increasingly urbanized, with increased risk of their degradation through, for example, ecosystem fragmentation and exploitation.

The Conference of the Contracting Parties, in that Resolution, called for all Ramsar Parties (among other things) to review the state of their urban and peri-urban wetlands and to put in place schemes for their restoration and rehabilitation as needed; to formulate their land-use planning and management in such a way as to minimize any future impacts on urban wetlands and on those currently in peri-urban or rural situations that are vulnerable to urban encroachment; to give recognition to local governments that exhibit exemplary management interventions, including wise use in urban and peri-urban wetlands, and to document best practices for dissemination; and to become involved in the Convention on Biological Diversity’s Global Partnership on Cities and Biodiversity.

Importantly, Resolution X.27 also requested the Convention’s subsidiary scientific body, the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), to prepare guidelines for managing urban and peri-urban wetlands, in accordance with an ecosystem approach, taking into account issues such

as climate change, ecosystem services, food production, human health and livelihoods – and a Working Group of the STRP is presently making progress on this task.

And, appropriately, the Parties, in that Resolution, also requested our Secretariat to explore ways of establishing collaborative links with the UN-HABITAT programme concerning the promotion of social and environmental sustainability of towns and cities in relation to wetlands and water. We are very hopeful that we can continue to move forward in forging that cooperative relationship with UN-HABITAT, perhaps most notably by drawing upon the work now underway by our STRP Working Group.

So, once again, I wish to emphasize that the Ramsar Convention fully shares an understanding of the vital importance of the need for Planning our Urban Future, and we join with all of our colleagues on this World Habitat Day in pledging our best efforts towards this common goal

Anada Tiéga
Secretary General
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