

**CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)**  
**Preparatory Meeting for Ramsar COP10**  
**IV PAN-AMERICAN REGIONAL MEETING,**  
Merida, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, September 18 thru 21, 2007

**FINAL REPORT**

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**Tuesday - September 18, 2007**

**Field Visit: Laguna de Mucubají, Sierra Nevada National Park**

**Opening and welcome: H.E. Yuvirí Ortega Lovera, Engineer**  
Minister of the Environment, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

**Mr. Anada Tiega**

The Secretary General, Ramsar Convention Secretariat.

**Subregional Working Groups** (North America – Caribbean - Central America and South America). Contracting Parties' meetings to deal with priority issues for each region.

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**Wednesday - September 19, 2007**

**1. Registration of participants and seat accommodation in the Convention Center.**

**2. Opening of the meeting**

*Rapporteurs: Ministry of the Environment, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Ramsar Secretariat*

**Chair:** *Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela*

**Vice-Chair:** Guatemala submitted the nomination of Saint Lucia as Vice-Chair, supported by Argentina and Ecuador and accepted by Saint Lucia.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, welcomed the participants and thanked them for attending the IV Pan-American Regional Meeting. The Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention, Mr. Anada Tiega, addressed the meeting, thanking the participants for attending the Regional Preparatory Meeting for COP10, under the theme of HEALTHY WETLANDS, HEALTHY PEOPLE. He also made reference to the importance of food safety and water quality, which represent challenges that must be approached in a comprehensive manner, in addition to the analysis related to wetland policies. This enhances the importance of inventories and monitoring.

Poverty and new approaches to the issues of health and sanitation, water scarcity, and the increasingly frequent conditions derived from floods as well as the impact of climate change, call for better understanding and enhanced management practices of natural resources. All these issues and challenges must be approached working on common themes through cooperation with other conventions, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The Ramsar Convention keeps a close relationship with NGOs, which are considered as very important partners, and welcomes their presence at this meeting, in light of the need for active interaction involving communities, wetland user groups and institutions, among others.

Communication is the issue – if we want to convince the authorities we must be firm advocates of this Convention.

He also thanked Fish and Wildlife Service and the Norwegian and Venezuelan Governments for the financial support for the meeting.

### **3. Adoption of the Agenda**

**Senior Advisor for the Americas, Ramsar Secretariat:** The agenda is aimed at the discussion of several themes; to this end seven work areas have been defined. At the beginning of each session, an introduction will be made by an organization, the Secretariat or the Parties, followed by subregional discussions. She also referred to the suggested changes: one rapporteur per day and plenary sessions chaired by the Chairperson of the meeting.

After this explanation, the Agenda was approved.

### **4. Appointment of Rapporteur for the day**

Venezuela was appointed Rapporteur for the day, with the support of Mexico, El Salvador and Cuba.

### **5. Overview of the achievements and challenges for the implementation of the Convention in the Americas Region: the International Perspective.**

Presented by Anada Tiega, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention. Reference was made to the new Parties to the Convention since 2005, its scope, the preparatory work for COP10, World Wetlands Day 2008, and regional meetings.

### **6. The Region's achievements since COP9. Ramsar Secretariat Report on the application of the Convention in the Pan-American region: update and progress since COP9.**

**María Rivera**, Senior Advisor for the Americas, submitted a report on the main activities concerning the implementation of the Convention by the Contracting Parties as of 2005. Reference was made to the new designation of Ramsar sites in the region since 2005, the formulation of new policies, and the formation of National Ramsar Committees.

The Parties were urged to update their Ramsar Information Sheets (RISs) and to pay any outstanding contributions. The Parties were also advised to submit on time their project reports in order to ensure completion of projects executed through the Wetlands for the Future Fund and the Ramsar Small Grants Fund.

Other topics dealt with included regional initiatives such as the Ramsar Regional Center (CREHO) in Panama, whose activities were highlighted, especially in regard to the training of focal points of the Ramsar Convention, despite a lack of sufficient technical and financial resources. As to the meeting on the Regional Strategy for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of High Andean Wetlands, held on September 15 through 17, 2007, in the city of Merida, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, reference was made to its results regarding the definition of actions for the financial implementation of the Strategy and its monitoring mechanism. Reference was also made to the setting up of a contact group including IUCN and the Secretariat, as well as WWF, Wetlands International, Birdlife, and the eight Andean countries.

Similarly, reference was made to the countries' contributions to the Convention, urging prompt payment to enable the Secretariat to carry out its functions in support of the implementation of the Convention.

She also stated that since the report is not all-encompassing, the Parties are invited to take the floor and provide their inputs.

**Argentina** thanks the **Government of Venezuela for hosting the meeting and congratulates Mr. Anada Tiega for his appointment as Secretary General and Mrs. Maria Rivera for her appointment as Senior Advisor for the Americas.**

Reported that information on the Llancañelo Lagoon registered in the Montreux Record was sent to the Ramsar Secretariat, and informed about actions that have been taken to remove the Site from the record like a Workshop on Exotic Species Control, and that an Action Committee was set up. It stated its political commitment to the payment of its dues.

The Republic of Argentina thanked the Ramsar Secretariat and South American Office of Wetlands International for its contribution in the making of the video on "Wetlands of Argentina", with the financial support of the Wetlands for the Future Fund. This video responds to the country's need for information material on the service and values of our wetlands, with special reference to the forthcoming celebration of "World Wetland Day".

**El Salvador** reported that the country is already working on the items dealt with by the Secretary General, particularly on the issue of wetlands and the protection of hydrological basins, and it expects to work with Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua on transboundary basins and systems.

**Venezuela** congratulated the Secretary General on his appointment, as well as Maria Rivera for her report, which provides a broader view of the work being conducted in the region. It once again acknowledged the importance of the Regional Strategy in fostering conservation not only in High Andean Wetlands but also in other areas.

**Nicaragua** thanked the Venezuelan government for its hospitality, welcomed the newly appointed Secretary General, and congratulated the Senior Advisor for the Americas. The representative formally delivered a document entitled "Evaluation of Environmental Damages Caused by Hurricane Felix", which affected the Ramsar Site No. 1135, *Cayos Miskitos y Franja Costera Inmediata*.

**Brazil** thanked the Venezuelan Government, welcomed the Secretary General, thanked the Secretariat's Senior Advisor for her work, and congratulated her. As to the presentation made by the Secretary General, Brazil acknowledged the importance of wetland conservation.

Recognizing the importance of wetlands and of strengthening of the Convention, Brazil stated its concern regarding the broad range of issues Ramsar deals with and highlighted the importance of maintaining the focus on the main objective of the Convention. Although sharing the view that wetland-related topics such as climate change and biodiversity should be addressed while encouraging synergies with other MEAs, Brazil stated that dispersion should be avoided and the Convention must focus on its main original objective and on strengthening its role vis-à-vis other agreements.

Brazil noted that progress made is summarized in a five-year monitoring of wetlands health based on the use of Reef Check, an internationally approved methodology; also, Brazil has adhered to ICRI and is now part of the world network. A GEF project for mangrove conservation and

sustainable use has been approved for the study of fishing as an ecosystem and its management, valuation and financial mechanisms, and integrated management of watersheds and coastal zones, together with training and monitoring. The Council of Protected Areas has been established. The country is updating and reviewing the priority areas for the conservation and sustainable use of Brazilian biodiversity and is developing a publication on aquatic protected areas as a fisheries management tool.

**Chile** greeted the Secretary General and Senior Advisor and made it known that Chile has a National Strategy on Wetlands. As part of specific activities related to the Action Plan for a Wise Use of Wetlands in Chile, the following studies should be mentioned: Classification of Wetlands in Chile, as a working tool and a Guide for ecological evaluation of wetlands. Regarding catchments areas, the National Strategy for Watershed Management is being developed, and those in charge have been told to include in the integrated basin management aspects related to limnic subsystems.

**Mexico** greeted the Secretary General and Senior Advisor. Mexico highlighted the relevance of the Ramsar Convention and of all cooperative efforts made in Mexico and other countries for the implementation of the strategy. It stressed how important it is for Mexico to work on wetlands, describing the substantial actions carried out in the country that include, among others: relevant National Policies and Strategies regarding coastal zones, river basins and mangroves; National Strategy on Climate Change; National Wetlands Inventory (on-going); National Committee on Priority Wetlands; CEPA Initiative and Regional CEPA Centers; and official guidelines on the matter. Likewise, the delegate emphasized the importance of on-going processes and actions aimed at harmonizing policies, developing management programs, training and education, funding and international cooperation.

Mexico has 67 wetlands of international importance and has decided on the addition of ten (10) more by February 2, 2008.

**Saint Lucia** thanked the government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and congratulated the recently appointed Secretary General and Senior Advisor. These two positions are not easy, nor is the field of wetlands in view of the large number of Contracting Parties.

The delegate noted that during Maria Rivera's presentation, she said St. Lucia has the smallest wetland in the region but on development is very big. Tourism development is taking up all the coastal area where the wetlands are located. The formation of a National Wetlands Committee must happen very soon, which will help influence government to change development plans in wetlands, especially in the Ramsar site.

The Secretary General made mention of the Ramsar Convention working closely with the Biodiversity and Climate Change Conventions. In St. Lucia the government has made a commitment to over five different conventions and that puts pressure on existing human resources. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on the island also have a stake in the work of the environment. What is found is that each agency wants its convention to have a greater say in the work of the resource, and therefore these gaps must be bridged, and everyone must work together for the protection of the same resource.

**Cuba** thanked the government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and congratulated the recently appointed Secretary General and Senior Advisor for the Americas. With respect to implementation of the Convention in Cuba, there is an ongoing process for the management of six Ramsar sites in Cuba; approval for establishing Management Committees for three sites under shared administration; an Action Plan for the National Environmental Strategy in which issues

related to the management of wetlands are defined as a priority; and work is underway for expanding the marine area of the Ramsar site *Ciénaga de Zapata*, including in that site an important coral reef area.

In reference to the Secretary General's and Senior Advisor's presentations, the delegate observed that as an island the country assigns top priority to issues related to climate change and wetlands and reported the realization of two national workshops on the subject. Recently, Cuba has been affected by extreme climatic phenomena, intense drought and hurricanes, that have directly impacted its Ramsar sites. Important measures have been implemented to guarantee optimal use of water resources and reinforce the work carried out by the water basin commissions, of national and provincial interest, taking into account its interest for the Ramsar sites and wetlands of interest for conservation.

Regarding the payment of dues, Cuba stated its commitment to pay its outstanding dues, indicating that on January next year it would make the first installment for approximately one-half of the amount due.

**Costa Rica** congratulated the recently appointed Secretary General and Senior Advisor. Regarding compliance with its obligations under the Convention, information sheets of existing Ramsar sites have been updated and based on the National Wetland Policy and the Central American Policy, and the country is in the process of formalizing its National Wetland Strategy. Likewise, it has actively participated in the drafting of the High Andean Wetlands Strategy together with Contracting Parties of South America. Updating of the National Wetland Inventory has started and a process of analysis to remove from the Montreux Record the Ramsar site *Palo Verde* and include the Ramsar site *RNVS Caño Negro* is underway. As part of the ratification of the Convention on Climate Change, the "Regional Project to Promote the Capabilities of Adaptation to Climate Change", financed by the Global Environment Facility and coordinated in Costa Rica by the National Meteorological Institute, is a project that sets forth, among other documents, the National Strategy on Climate Change, available to the Parties upon request. Currently, Costa Rica is in the process of zoning the Maritime-Terrestrial Zone, which is part of the nation's Natural Heritage.

With respect to the payment of dues, the delegate reported that payment of outstanding amounts is in the process of approval.

**Suriname** thanked the government of Venezuela for hosting this meeting and congratulated the Secretary General, Mr. Anada Tiega, on his appointment, and also congratulated and looked forward to working with the new Senior Advisor, Ms. Maria Rivera. With regard to the report of the Senior Advisor, Suriname mentioned that the project financed by the Small Grants Fund is in implementation and is to be finalized by the end of this year. A progress report will be submitted shortly to the Ramsar Secretariat.

Suriname also noted the importance of capacity building at the national and local level and therefore looked forward to continuing its support for the Ramsar Regional Center-CREHO and the Western Hemisphere Migratory Species Initiative-WHMSI.

On the annual contribution, the government of Suriname expressed its commitment to doing its part.

**Paraguay** thanked the Venezuelan government and people for the kind hospitality, welcomed the Secretary General, and appreciated the work done by the Senior Advisor.

As party to the Convention, Paraguay has appointed its representatives, that is, the Focal Points for the STRP and governmental as well as non-governmental CEPA focal points; the original document with the ministerial appointments has been delivered to Maria Rivera, Senior Advisor for the Americas.

In June this year, Paraguay enacted the Water Resources Act and it is currently in the process of enforcement; thus, the management of water basins, rivers, water/ecology balance, parameters, etc., is being adapted to the new requirements.

With respect to the Ramsar Information Sheets, Paraguay is conducting a national inventory and ecological evaluation of these areas for its presentation at a national seminar next November, when the government of Paraguay and its Secretary for the Environment expect to be accompanied by Maria Rivera, the Senior Advisor.

At the end of this meeting Paraguay will start assessing the loss and damages to the environment caused by forest fires; such fires have affected the forest of Tinfunque, a National Park and Ramsar site, number 730 in the List of Wetlands of International Importance.

Paraguay publicly expressed its gratitude for the voluntary and unconditional assistance offered at this time of crisis by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

The Wetlands Inventory is the next challenge in preparation for COP10.

**Peru** thanked the government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and congratulated the recently appointed Secretary General and Senior Advisor. It pointed out that a National Technical Group has been set up together with other agencies (forestry, water, legal, etc.). It is about to complete its National Report: 1. Wetlands Policy; 2. Wetlands Inventory involving the private sector; 3. Thanked WWF for its support in declaring the new Ramsar site, *Las Arreviatadas Lagoons*.

**Bolivia** thanked the government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and congratulated the recently appointed Secretary General and Senior Advisor. It already has a proposal for a National Wetlands Policy. Progress is being made on the National Wetlands and the High Andean Wetlands Inventories. RISs are being updated. As to transboundary wetlands, work is being done on the Titicaca Lake in Peru. A management plan for three Ramsar sites is being developed, and community tourism activities are being fostered.

**Ecuador** reported that it already has a coastal resources Programme. It is currently working on the zoning of the coastal ring and the declaration of two Ramsar sites. It announced its Web page on coastal zones.

**Honduras** reported that dues for 2008 have already been budgeted and that it has ratified the Convention. Four (4) RISs have been updated. An inventory of continental waters has been made. A declaration on the national hydrological policy, including wetlands, is about to be made.

**Guatemala**, after congratulating the Secretary General and the Senior Advisor, commented that they are making big efforts to recover the Ramsar site *Parque Nacional Laguna del Tigre* and that the Secretariat of the National Council on Protected Areas (CONAP) has developed political, legal and financial efforts which have achieved the inclusion of the site in a state of emergency, through a Guatemalan congressional law, assigning US\$ 500,000 per year for the site restoration. The site is now implementing its new Master Plan 2007-2011.

To date, 6 of the 7 Ramsar sites of Guatemala are implementing a management plan, and the delegation took this opportunity to hand in to the Secretariat the ones for the Ramsar sites *Bocas del Polochic* and *Parque Nacional Yaxhá*.

Recently, the new Regulation of Co-administration, which will regulate and approach the administration of protected areas to the communities living in the buffer zones, has been approved.

It was reported that a Human Settlements in Protected Areas Policy has been developed, which will focus on the communities living in the areas.

**WWF Guyana** thanked the government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and congratulated the recently appointed Secretary General and Senior Advisor. WWF Guyana's new Freshwater Programme supports Suriname and Guyana in conservation and management of wetlands and water resources. Guyana has not acceded to the Ramsar Convention – the process was started a few years ago, but has since been halted. However, as part of WWF Guyana's Freshwater Programme, there will be support given to the government of Guyana in the process of signing the convention and designation of a site. Since earlier this year [2007], WWF Guyana has collaborated with the Environmental Protection Agency to assist and encourage Guyana's signing the Convention. Hopefully, Guyana will sign the Convention by COP10. WWF Guyana said that it will seek and looks forward to the support of the Ramsar Secretariat.

**7. Report of the Subgroup on Finance.** *Standing Committee Representative of the Finance Sub-group (Sergio Lasso).*

Sergio Lasso presented the 2007 budget and the items thereof. He stated that the Standing Committee had asked the Secretariat to develop a draft core budget for the next three years using the same format, and to attach an Information Document thereto.

Regarding regional initiatives, he mentioned that if funding has been received from the core budget, half-year reports must be submitted to the Secretariat as well as progress reports, the first of which was delivered on July 31, 2007.

In connection with Decision SC 35-8, the Standing Committee requested the Secretariat to present a single document on regional initiatives before the month preceding the Committee meetings, thus allowing for their review and discussion.

**8. Presentation on the present legal status of the Secretariat.** *Anada Tiega, Secretary General, Ramsar Convention / Sergio Lasso, Regional Representative to the Standing Committee*

**The Secretary General** stated that the Secretariat has no legal status. In this regard, he pointed out that actions to be undertaken are as follows:

1. As an independent intergovernmental body, benefits and difficulties are to be analyzed. Nineteen people work for the Secretariat. It is difficult to assert that it is an independent body having so many people.
2. To continue with IUCN but setting up specific conditions for the Secretariat.
3. Similarly, the possibility of becoming part of the United Nations system is being explored. He thanked Ecuador for its support to this process. In addition, he suggested holding a meeting with the government of Switzerland as the host country of the Secretariat.

The Secretariat will not make any decision; it will only provide several options, the Contracting Parties being the ones to decide. The help of the Contracting Parties is needed to move ahead in the right direction so that the Convention will unmistakably but positively grow. He concluded by saying that the Parties will receive a report on all proposals.

## **9. Plenary Discussion**

**Mexico** would not support the mention, in Resolutions concerning budgetary issues, of possible modifications in the contributions, depending on the eventual change in the scale of contributions of the United Nations. This is in order to budget the amount of the contributions correctly and avoid delays in its payments. The amount of the contributions should be defined in the COP and maintained through the corresponding period without modifications.

**Canada** stated that its government could provide legal assistance to the Secretariat at its request and that relocation of the Secretariat would generate a great deal of expense.

**Ecuador** noted that attaining legal status would imply that since the Secretariat would no longer be an administrative IUCN program, resources would be saved.

**The Secretary General** thanked Canada for its offer to provide legal advice. Regarding IUCN, 13% of the budget is allocated for the payment of administrative and financial assistance. Prior to any decision, Contracting Parties should analyze the situation because even though leaving IUCN entails saving resources, joining UNEP will imply costs. The SG confirmed the Secretariat's need for country support.

**El Salvador** stated that this issue has been discussed for quite a while and no adequate solution has been found. Decisions will be made by Contracting Parties. Countries should analyze the various economic and political variables through the relevant ministries. A governmental structure cannot be set up within a nongovernmental organization. The delegate requested the establishment of formal contacts with the governments.

**Brazil** supported ongoing evaluations concerning the legal status of the Convention but stated that any modification made should not imply an increase in the quotas to be paid by developing countries.

**Mexico** said that it would agree to recommend researching the models, in the frame of the United Nations system, used by other multilateral organizations, in order to consider other legal and financial viable options, and analyze and present them in COP10, to decide on the best option for the Convention and generate a new Resolution.

## **10. Presentation of COP10 Program and the Strategic Plan 2009 – 2014 of the Ramsar Convention. Mr. Anada Tiega, Secretary General, Ramsar Convention.**

This presentation was on the Agenda for COP10 and the Strategic Plan for the Convention. Regarding the latter, the SG referred to the Convention's overall goals for the next three year period.

## **11. Presentation of issues of interest for the region.**

- *Report of the Subgroup on Finance: Contact Group on the Small Grants Fund (SGF). Mr. Sergio Lasso. (Attached information delivered to the Parties)*

The presentation was aimed at submitting the objectives of the proposed fund. Reference was made to the project portfolio as well as to the mechanisms for the submission of proposals.

- *Report on Resolution IX.15 on the status of Ramsar sites and the format for National Reports. Ms. Maria Rivera, Senior Advisor for the Americas*

The Senior Advisor referred to Resolution IX.15 on the status of Ramsar sites, presenting the situation of countries such as Colombia, Chile, Honduras, Peru, and the United States, and where changes have been occurring in the ecological characters of the Ramsar sites., An ongoing review of measures adopted by countries to preserve ecological characteristics is being conducted within the framework of Standing Committee decisions.

An explanation was presented of the format for national reports, and its structure and objectives, to be used by Contracting Parties in March 2008.

In respect to Resolutions, mention was made of the areas studied by Dave Pritchard in his review of 253 decisions classified by themes. Conflicts, overlaps and other issues found would require their withdrawal.

## **12. Discussion**

Regarding the review of Ramsar Resolutions, the representative of **Brazil** requested the review of all Resolutions and not only those deemed as more important, as well as their discussion during COP10 along with information regarding conflicts caused by, or reviews made of, past Resolutions in order to avoid inappropriate use of decisions by actors unknowledgeable of such conflicts.

In respect to the Small Grants Portfolio (SGP) proposed by the Subgroup on Finance, she believed that the priority given to the interests of donors could encourage discretionary choices on the part of donors, because instead of following priorities set by the Convention, decisions would be made according to the interests of donors. Likewise, the delegate referred to a competition between both mechanisms, since SGP could offer financial advantages.

**Chile** stated that the proposal made by Mr. Sergio Lasso, representative of the contact group, was interesting and deserved further analysis. She also deemed it necessary to discuss the criteria for acceptance of projects under SGP, demanding that SGP be truly a supplement to SGF, should the idea be approved as proposed, which would allow the financing of some initiatives requiring a larger budget than the ones currently financed under SGF.

The government of **Venezuela** requested further details on the proposed Small Project Portfolio in order to express its opinion on the matter.

**Mexico** indicated that it will revise the National Report format, to be presented by the Contracting Parties before the celebration of COP10, as soon as the Spanish version is available. The revision will look for information requests that cannot be delivered, that are not strategic for decision making, or that create a bigger burden for the country.

## **13. Presentation on the current status of implementation of subregional initiatives and other ongoing initiatives related to this subject.**

### **Introduction**

- *Strategy for the conservation and sustainable use of High Andean Wetlands. Mr. Sergio Lasso, Ecuador*

**Ecuador** presented the High Andean Wetlands Strategy, as well as the results obtained at the workshop conducted from September 15 through 17, 2007.

- *Current Status of the Ramsar Regional Center. Ms. Rosa Montañez*

The **Director of the Center** made a presentation on the background leading to its establishment as well as on the main activities conducted during the last year and the future outlook.

- *Strategy System of Wetlands of La Plata River Basin. Argentina and Brazil.*

The delegations of **Brazil** and **Argentina** presented the Strategy for the conservation and wise use of wetlands of the La Plata river basin and expressed their interest in setting up contact groups as well as a forum for discussion.

The representatives of **Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay** and **Uruguay** agreed on the establishment of a contact group to move forward with the creation process of the Strategy for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Riverine Wetlands in the La Plata Basin. The contact group members would include the Senior Advisor for the Americas, the Regional Representative in the Standing Committee, government representatives of countries forming the La Plata Basin, the Ramsar Regional Center for the Western Hemisphere – CREHO, and the international organizations Wetlands International and WWF, which have expressed their interest in supporting this initiative. This group will function through an electronic forum moderated by the Republic of Argentina.

Mechanisms for the incorporation of other international organizations associated with the Ramsar Convention and related national NGOs will be developed.

- *Status of the Central American Wetlands Policy, Mr. César Funes, El Salvador*

The representative of **El Salvador** made a presentation on the objectives, goals and activities of this policy and mentioned the need to strengthen several aspects, such as institutional, training, funding, and exchange of experience.

#### **14. Plenary Discussion**

**Paraguay** mentioned the Declaration of Merida referring to the setting up of a contact group for the Initiative of Plata Basin and a forum for discussion.

Several countries of the region acknowledged the work done by the Ramsar Regional Center for the Western Hemisphere (CREHO). In this regard, the representative from **Mexico** offered her country's experience on a wetlands course held every year. **Canada** congratulated the Center for some work done exceeding the initial requests, thus highlighting the use made of limited resources. Similarly, Canada urged CREHO to support the other regional centers being established in the hemisphere so that CREHO's experience could be used as lessons learnt. **Cuba** also congratulated the Center and stressed the importance of the newsletter being edited, since it is a means to disseminate research works to which technicians do not have easy access otherwise. In addition, Cuba urged working on a printed publication containing research works on wetlands carried out in the region and joined the group of countries acknowledging efforts made by Wetlands International and WWF.

**Argentina:** Acknowledged the work done by the Ramsar Regional Center –CREHO in regard the coordination and definition of priorities for the region and urged the promotion of training activities in different countries of the region to use the facilities and the human resources available in a way to reach more people and reduce the cost of transport. Argentina offers its support and capacities of the exiting courses they have in order to make contributions to the programs defined by the Convention.

The governments of **Ecuador** and of the Bolivarian Republic of **Venezuela** expressed their interest in creating an initiative for mangrove ecosystems; this was approved by the delegates of Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Peru. To start the meeting, the Venezuelan delegates suggested creating a contact group, and upon the parties' approval it was decided that Venezuela should be the Group's coordinator. **Wetlands International** expressed its support to this initiative.

**Ecuador** acknowledged that the governments of Ecuador and Venezuela have been working on a draft Resolution that will be circulated afterwards. Such a draft Resolution proposes an evaluation of the implementation of Resolution VIII.32 *Conservation, integrated management, and sustainable use of mangrove ecosystems and their resources*. The purpose of the Resolution would be to make a review of the implementation efforts made by the Contracting Parties and verify whether the objectives set up were being achieved. The Secretariat was requested to ask the STRP to develop guidance for a regional evaluation of the mangrove ecosystem, as well as initiatives, networks and other ongoing collective efforts.

In addition, **Ecuador** invited all Contracting Parties having wetlands in their territories to take this initiative, and especially Brazil and Mexico who have already developed projects and policies for this ecosystem. **Mexico** has supported the idea with its national mangrove policy of over six years, but would need to make consultations with its government and SEMARNAT. **Peru** and **El Salvador** also supported Ecuador's proposal.

**Mexico** referred to the mechanisms used for the reversal of island formation processes caused by climate changes. Mexico suggested that restoration processes should be considered and acknowledged the importance of protection or shielding actions to prevent the effects of climate changes. In addition, it invited the Contracting Parties of Asia and America to propose a parallel event on mangroves (a workshop or side event) during COP10.

**Venezuela** requested the setting up of a contact group to work on this Resolution. **Cuba** supported Venezuela's proposal on the setting up of contact groups. **El Salvador**, **Brazil** and **Peru** also asked to join the contact group. **Mexico** expressed its interest in participating in the contact group, but has to consult with its Ministry of Foreign Affairs. **Costa Rica** supported the motion and requested to be a part of the contact group. **El Salvador** proposed that the delegation of Venezuela be the coordinator of the contact group. **Venezuela** accepted the appointment as Coordinator. **Ecuador** expressed thanks.

**Nicaragua** explained that it is presided over by a new government and therefore has to consult with the pertinent authorities, since right now the country is going through an emergency situation due to Hurricane Felix. **WWF Colombia** said that it will participate in the mangrove contact group. **Guatemala** joined the mangrove contact group. **Wetlands International** suggested that this opportunity should be taken to find seed funds with the Mangrove Network and said that it desires to be part of the mangrove contact group. **Ecuador** thanked Wetlands International and WWF

Colombia for joining the contact group, and requested that the place and date of the meeting be defined.

**Paraguay** pointed out that the five countries involved in the “Strategy for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of River Wetlands in Plata Basin” initiative have agreed to set up a contact group which will work through an e-forum moderated by Argentina. In this regard, a draft Declaration will be submitted to the Regional Advisor. Paraguay read a Declaration upon request of the Regional Advisor, M. Rivera.

Paraguay read the DECLARATION on a Strategy for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Riverine Wetlands in the La Plata Basin.

At the city of Merida, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, during the proceedings of the IV Pan American Meeting of the Wetland Convention (Ramsar, Iran, 1971) held from September 18 thru 20, 2007, the representatives of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, agreed to:

Set up a contact group for the development of a Strategy for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Riverine Wetlands in the La Plata Basin.

The contact group will function through an electronic forum moderated by Argentina.

The members of the Contact Group are the Senior Advisor for the Americas, the Regional Representative in the Standing Committee, government representatives of countries forming the La Plata Basin, the Ramsar Regional Center for the Western Hemisphere – CREHO and the international organizations Wetlands International and WWF, which have expressed their interest in supporting this initiative.

Progress will be made regarding the mechanisms of incorporation of other International Organization Partners of the Ramsar Convention and specialized national NGOs.

## **Thursday, September 20<sup>th</sup>**

### **Opening of the Meeting**

Argentina was nominated as Rapporteur and Cuba as Vice chair. Both accepted.

### **11. Draft conclusions of the first day’s discussions**

Presentation of the designated rapporteur: Ministry of the Environment of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Reading of the first day meeting’s report.

### **Plenary discussion**

**Nicaragua** requested the following amendments:

- To add that a report on the damage produced by hurricane Félix to Ramsar site No. 1135 *Cayos Miskitos y Franja Costera Inmediata* was handed in to the Secretariat,
- Even though it seconds the initiative on mangroves, will not participate as a country.

**Brazil** requested that the rapporteur's report be distributed in writing for better assessment and to enable corrections if needed.

**Suriname** stated that the project being implemented with the SGF will conclude this year, and a report on that will be submitted by the end of the year. Also confirmed that the country will be paying its contribution shortly. Underscored the importance of developing training programs.

**María Rivera** requested that amendments to the report be submitted to the Secretariat in writing.

**Cuba** stated its commitment to pay its 2008 contribution, making the first payment of half of the amount in January.

**Venezuela** informed that the government of Ecuador and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela have manifested an interest in creating an initiative for the mangrove ecosystems, which was supported by the delegates of Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Peru. The government of Venezuela proposed the setting up of a Contact Group, and with the approval of the Contracting Parties, Venezuela will be the chair.

**Ecuador** expressed the opinion that the amount of 160,000 Swiss francs paid to IUCN for its support to the Convention is not so high, bearing in mind that the overall budget of the Convention is in excess of 4 million Swiss francs.

## **Priorities for the next Triennium 2008-2011 and Preparation for the COP10**

### **Thematic Working Groups**

#### **12. Thematic Discussion Groups (Contracting Parties) regarding subregional priorities**

##### **Scientific and Technical Aspects**

###### **Introduction**

- *Current status of the Work Plan of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel. María Rivera, Senior Advisor for the Americas*

The Senior Advisor for the Americas presented the current status of the STRP Work Plan and explained the main work areas and which products are focused on generating the possible Resolutions, technical guidelines, and Ramsar reports.

**El Salvador** asked whether the nine thematic groups of the STRP can be modified after their discussion at the subregional group level. It expressed its interest in including topics such as fishing and agriculture, which pose threats in many countries, as well as the human aspects and the communities relating to wetlands.

**María Rivera** stated that the themes to be covered by the STRP were defined at COP9 in Uganda. She suggested the possibility of discussing themes that could be included for the forthcoming triennium and recommended that these priorities be discussed during the subregional group meetings.

**Ecuador** expressed its view that the presentation on the STRP should have been made by Mr. Juan J. Neiff, its member for the Neotropics. However, communication between S. Lasso, Regional

Representative, and J. Neiff was complicated, as he did not respond to many of the e-mail messages sent to him. Ecuador asked about the procedure for appointing STRP members.

**María Rivera** described the procedure: Parties as well as other bodies submit nominations based on the scientific and technical merits of candidates. They must then apply, filling a form to be evaluated by a selection committee whose members belong to the STRP. The selected candidate is then appointed.

J. Neiff has been invited to the STRP meeting to be held in March, but he informed that he would not be able to attend due to prior commitments.

- *Feasibility of a regional meeting of the STRP National Focal Points in Quito, for May 2008. Mr. Sergio Lasso, Ecuador*

**Sergio Lasso** made a presentation on the meeting that the STRP expects to hold in March 2008, in Quito. It would be a two-day meeting attended by the STRP's National Focal Points of the Neotropics, as well as WWF, WI, IUCN and Birdlife International. Its objectives are to define regional priorities concerning scientific and technical aspects on wetlands. The Nature Conservancy in Ecuador has offered partial financing for this meeting.

**Canada** said that it was assumed that this year there will be new nominations for STRP members, and the Parties will have the opportunity to nominate experts. Canada must finance the technical expert attending the STRP meeting, which is creating financial difficulties, as there will be a meeting in January in Switzerland. Canada will be looking for scientists as potential members of STRP.

**WWF Colombia** conveyed the information that WWF and CREHO will be working on a draft Resolution for COP10 dealing with the development of guidelines by STRP on EIE and development activities. **María Rivera** suggested that this proposal be discussed during the subregional group meetings.

**The Chair** suggested that all presentations to be made during the Plenary be made at once, so that subregions can then meet in their groups for the discussion of said presentations. The proposal was accepted.

### **13. Thematic Discussion Groups (Contracting Parties) regarding subregional priorities**

#### **Communication and Cultural Aspects**

##### **Introduction**

- *Report prepared by the group monitoring CEPA activities of the Convention. John Bowleg (Bahamas)*
- *Report prepared by the group on cultural aspects: presentation on communication and cultural aspects. Sergio Lasso (Ecuador)*

**Paraguay** requested to have a printed copy of the presentation in order to have a more productive discussion in the subregional groups. **The Secretariat** informed that copies of the presentations will be handed in to the participants.

**Ecuador** asked about the appointment of Bohórquez to the Oversight Panel of CEPA activities. **Bahamas** explained the composition of the CEPA Oversight Panel. He informed that Bohórquez,

from Ecuador, was proposed for appointment in SC 34, and since then he is a member of the oversight panel, as a representative of an NGO.

**Mexico** considered that what is qualified by the Working Group as “cultural values” refers, in essence, to traditional practices relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, and that that could be confused with the Convention on Biological Diversity’s dispositions, and also in the field of competition between both treaties. Regarding the cultural values related to the ecological functioning of wetlands, the Consultative Council of the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples, Mexico has recommended the recognition and protection of sacred sites.

It is considered that the determination of Wetlands of International Importance especially as the habitat of waterfowl has to continue considering only the ecological, botanical, zoological, limnological or hydrological aspects, as established in Article 2 of the Ramsar Convention. It was also noted that cultural values are already regulated by the Convention on Biological Diversity, as traditional practices relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.

Mexico suggested that the Multidisciplinary Working Group on cultural values of wetlands should continue with its tasks, considering the progress made in the framework of the CBD, linking, strengthening and, if possible, standardizing both international instruments and concepts, considering that wetlands are areas of *in situ* conservation according to Article 8 of that Convention.

#### **14. Thematic Discussion Groups (Contracting Parties) regarding sub regional priorities**

##### **Transboundary Wetlands**

###### **Introduction**

- *Report by El Salvador/IUCN*

**César Funes** from El Salvador made the presentation on Transboundary Wetlands. He commented that this presentation was prepared by IUCN, which should have made it but was unable to attend this regional meeting. IUCN was requested to make further progress on this topic, which has already been discussed at COP9, and is likely to continue during COP10. A draft Resolution will be submitted to COP10.

**María Rivera** commented that there is an IUCN brochure on this topic that will be distributed.

**Canada** asked for a hard copy of the presentation for a more fruitful discussion. Canada also asked why it has been stated that a Resolution on this topic will be approved during COP10. **Brazil** also asked for a hard copy.

**El Salvador** reported that the Standing Committee or the body in charge of defining the agenda for COP10 will be making the decision as to whether a draft Resolution will be submitted for approval during COP10. It suggested that this topic be dealt with in subregional meetings.

**Cuba** asked if this document had been circulated among the Contracting Parties. **The Senior Advisor** reported that IUCN was asked for the document, and to submit the study, since Central America had asked to include this topic on the agenda for this meeting. Nevertheless, no representative of IUCN could be present in the regional meeting, but sent the presentation today, which is the reason why it could not be circulated before.

**Mexico** noted that the Water Strategy of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), in point C.2, paragraph 54 on regional and subregional cooperation, mentions that for the transboundary basins, including fluvial basins flowing between countries and shared subterranean waters, the countries can come to agreements at a regional and subregional level, taking into account the national conditions and the wider characteristics of the basin. The Mexican Delegation suggested asking UNEP for support or that its availability be established, in order to grant environmental normative support to guide a possible draft Resolution on Transboundary Basins in the framework of the Ramsar Convention.

## **15. Thematic Discussion Groups (Contracting Parties) regarding subregional priorities**

### **Wetlands and Climate Change**

#### **Introduction**

**María Rivera** made the presentation on Wetlands and Climate Change. She referred to the experts workshop which took place in March 2007 between the Ramsar Secretariat and the Convention on Biological Diversity and presented the results.

**Bahamas** noted that this is a hot topic. Caribbean countries should be evaluated as small island states, vulnerable as a consequence of the loss of wetlands due to climate change. It requested that Parties be considered in light of their vulnerability and not their economic condition, in order to prevent the extremely adverse effects on wetlands. It noted that, even though mention was made to the difficulties caused to the poorest sectors of the population as a consequence of the loss of wetlands, the overall population is equally impacted.

**Mexico** expressed awareness of the great importance of this issue and has made it clear through its National Strategy on Climate Change and the National Strategy of Development Planning of Coastal Zones, both made official in 2007. This has allowed it to confront this problem in a coordinated manner, involving the pertinent federal government dependencies.

**Venezuela** invited countries interested in the mangrove initiative to a meeting at 20:00 this evening.

**International Mangrove Network** made a declaration expressing its concern because it believes that there should be a greater interest on the part of Ramsar in the destruction of mangroves caused by shrimp farms and other industries. A printed copy will be handed in to participants.

***Meetings and subregional discussions of the Contracting Parties on Scientific and Technical Aspects, Cultural and Communication Aspects, Transboundary Wetlands, and Wetlands and Climate Change (See annexed documents of North America and the Caribbean, Central America and South America Subgroups).***

**Friday, September 21<sup>st</sup>**

#### **Opening of the Meeting**

**Rapporteur:** *Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Ministry of the Environment, Ramsar Secretariat*

**Chair:** Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

Selection of the rapporteur: The Chair proposes Venezuela.

Nomination of the Vice chair for the day:

**Venezuela** proposed Mexico and asked for acceptance.

**Mexico** accepted the proposal and indicated that it felt honored by the deference made by Venezuela.

## **16. Conclusions and recommendations of the second day**

After reading the report of the second day, the Senior Advisor for the Americas clarified that there were difficulties with the translation of this report, and for that reason, the same mechanism of the report of the past day will be used. Once the document is available and has been revised, the participants were asked to present their observations digitally, so that the final document shows what each Contracting Party wants to point out.

Again, she recommended that each Subgroup designate a rapporteur and that they hand in their comments digitally, and explained that this is necessary due to the short time the translators have at their disposal.

### **Plenary Discussion**

**Cuba** expressed gratitude for the work done by the Secretariat and made the observation regarding a point where they will pay their contributions of 2008, clarifying that Cuba will pay in January the contributions they still have pending to the moment with the Secretariat. They will hand in the written observations.

**The Chair** pointed out that, given no more observations, the agenda must be considered, and that there is a proposal for the delegates. According to the program, point No. 17 related to Wetlands and Development Activities should be discussed, followed by subregional meetings, and then a reconvening in plenary session to discuss point No. 18 concerning Wetlands and Poverty Reduction, where the Secretariat will make a presentation. The Chair proposed to make all the topic expositions before the subregional discussions, following yesterday's mechanism. If there is a common agreement, all the presentations will be made in plenary.

**Mexico** considered that the proposal would indeed speed up the meetings and therefore supported it. In the absence of any more interventions, the proposal for the modification in the agenda was approved and point No.17 of the Working Groups followed, with the presentation of Wetlands and Development Activities by the Senior Advisor of the Americas.

## **17. Thematic Discussion Groups (Contracting Parties) regarding subregional priorities**

### **Wetlands and Development Activities**

#### **Introduction**

The **Senior Advisor for the Americas** pointed out that her presentation basically contains the reasons for presenting the issue of Wetlands and Development Activities. In the last STRP meeting carried out in March, a discussion was held on a request made by African countries to have guidelines including this issue which involves extractive activities in wetlands, taking into account that these activities represent great threats to wetlands in that region. The study of results of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment clearly highlights the losses of wetlands by this means.

It is clear that the loss of wetlands is caused by infrastructure development, especially dams and such additional factors as changes in the land use, introduction of invasive species, drainage, tourism, fisheries and aquaculture, and water pollution. This is obviously a general problem around

the world. This series of development activities has had an effect mainly in the loss of habitats, fragmentation and obviously in the loss and extinction of species.

In relation to Ramsar sites, the Secretariat receives information from third parties regarding problems in Wetlands of International Importance and other wetland areas. The tendency is the increase in the degradation and reduction of wetlands around the world, and it is important that the management is focused on the dissemination and better knowledge of the values and functions of wetlands, which will lead to informed decisions, regulated policies, emphasizing Strategic Environmental Assessment and Environmental Impact Assessment as management tools for the Contracting Parties. She mentioned the generation of a sectorial guideline by the STRP, to support the management of the Contracting Parties.

**The Chair** highlighted the importance of considering the development models and the impacts in wetlands.

## **18. Thematic Discussion Groups (Contracting Parties) regarding subregional priorities**

### **Wetlands and Poverty Reduction**

#### **Introduction**

**The Senior Advisor for the Americas** mentioned that FUNGAP (an NGO based in Costa Rica) could not participate in the meeting to present their work related to this issue. On the other hand, Wetlands International has also been working with this issue and made the presentation on Wetlands and Poverty Reduction.

The presentation began with a general description of Wetlands International. It emphasized, among other things, that they work directly with the Ramsar Convention, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Convention on Migratory Species. It also identified the programs that make up the Wetlands and Poverty Reduction Project, its main objective, and its structure and components. Reference was made to the Seed Fund and the countries where work is being done. In Latin America, the presentation highlighted Ecuador and Argentina (wise use in peatlands of Tierra de Fuego) and mentioned the effort made in Paraguay to consolidate an association for sustainable participative management. It also referred to the background of the project, its opportunities, partners, main activities and important lessons learned (See presentation).

**Argentina** applauded the efforts of Wetlands International for the collaboration given to the country in the management of wetlands, as it constitutes a good example of the elaboration of policies through the participative use government-NGO. It informed that presently they are working with the Province of Tierra de Fuego, Antártica and Islas del Atlántico Sur for the designation of a Ramsar site involving a glaciers associated with a peatland.

**The Secretary General of the Convention** intervened to remind the Parties that the theme of the COP10 is "*Healthy wetlands, healthy people*" and that this issue should be brought into the discussions. He mentioned Resolution IX.19, approved by COP9 in Kampala, which refers to the multilateral processes, recognizing the importance of wetlands in conservation, retention and provision of water resources and food supply. The discharge and use of water has to be taken into consideration. It is important to strengthen the wise use of wetlands and its functions, for which we need to know the management tools they need and the ones previously used. The Secretary General asked the participants to pay attention to Resolution IX.9 related to the role of the Ramsar Convention in the prevention and mitigation of impacts associated with natural phenomena, including those induced or exacerbated by human activities. The importance of the Caracas

Declaration, carried out by the Forum of Ministers of the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean, should also be highlighted, and how to enhance the wetland management capacities in the Americas.

**Ecuador** maintained that it does not have complete information on the Wetlands International project and suggested improving the government communication and information. It invited all the Parties to contribute to giving technical support to Nicaragua, taking into account the considerations expressed by the Secretary General.

**WWF International** highlighted the importance of the issue on wetlands and poverty and the Wetlands International initiative. It is also important to join efforts with work done by WWF on this issue, especially projects of seed funds, taking into consideration the work carried out in Ecuador for the sustainable use of shellfish and the interest in working at a regional level. Processes and efforts in Colombia should be joint and supported by WWF Colombia through the work with the communities, local organizations and the government.

**El Salvador** asked Wetlands International if they have any ongoing project in the Central American Region regarding indicators needed to measure the impact and involvement of wetlands in poverty reduction, and as the National Report is being elaborated, what is wetlands' contribution to poverty reduction? The question is very wide and there is no indicator that measures the percentage that wetlands have contributed in this regard. The poorest communities are the ones living from the natural resources of wetlands, such as mangroves, lagoons and rivers.

He pointed out that these are the ecosystems that are giving more food supply to these families, but they don't find a way of measuring them so as to create a political impact. In many countries, this is a highly important issue. It asks for an evaluation of how wetlands help reduce poverty in our countries.

**Wetlands International** responded that sadly the project does not cover any country in Central America. Nevertheless, Wetlands International is planning to open an office next year in Panama, for the Central American and Caribbean Region. In this regard, they can start unifying efforts in elaborating a proposal or portfolio focused upon wetlands and means of sustenance.

Regarding the second question: how can we know if wetlands contribute to poverty reduction?, the first challenge that this project had was the fact that no quantitative data has been collected on how to relate the dependency of the poorest communities in the reduction of poverty. In this sense, Wetlands International has made efforts to join its knowledge with the International Water Institute in order to identify, at a global level, the best examples showing the direct and economic relation in many wetlands and other means of sustenance. The document will be available for the Parties at the end of this year.

**Chile** asked, in the process, how difficult has the work been with the governments and what is the viability?

**Wetlands International** responded that, in principle, all projects need the endorsement of the governments at a national and local level, but they have ensured the involvement of all the consortiums and partners in the projects.

**Mexico** presented two points: The first one was addressed to Wetlands International, in which it asked for more information regarding the project being carried out in Argentina, including the actions being taken in terms of an inventory of identification and delimitation of peatlands in other parts of the Neotropical region, because it is possible that Mexico has peatlands in high mountains

– these ecosystems tend to be present in temperate zones and the country is presently developing the National Wetland Inventory. They would appreciate more information on this topic, as they feel they do not have enough, and explained why these ecosystems are so important in the country. The second point referred to the existence of consciousness regarding the issue of poverty at different levels, but the flow and interpretation of information, as well as the scarcity of this, generates gaps and inappropriate answers creating a problem. They asked for the experience of Wetlands International in this regard.

**Wetlands International** responded that regarding peatlands, they have all the information available, which can be addressed through Wetlands International South America or the Project Paramo Andino. On the other hand, it indicated that it shares Mexico's inquiry, as the challenge of Wetlands International is to identify the moment to make the intervention, and that a process should be catalyzed. They have been working on this issue through different ways, which is why they have a capacity building component.

**The Secretary General** observed that, to evaluate poverty and poverty reduction, Resolution IX.1 regarding the inventory and evaluation of wetlands should be taken into consideration. In its Annexes there are different evaluations and characteristics, including the composition of species to identify its contribution in poverty reduction. They are not complete even though they represent an opportunity of a partial or indirect response, and there is still more to do. We will not find all the values of services that ecosystems provide, but we have some information related to species.

**Venezuela** invited the Working Group on Mangrove Ecosystems to a meeting in the lunch hours, so as to revise some inquiries that have arisen today.

**WWF Colombia** thanked Wetlands International and indicated that they have been working on this issue in Latin America and that efforts should be joined and experiences shared.

**El Salvador** asked WWF and Wetlands International for the information that comes out of the project on shellfish extraction in mangroves of Ecuador. It pointed out that they have been working on this but need information in order not to repeat things done by other parties. It considered that it is important that other NGOs advise the communities. Nevertheless, it considered that the administrative offices should follow up on the work that NGOs develop.

**Ecuador** referred the inquiry made by El Salvador of improving the availability of information regarding project activities carried out by NGOs. Such is the case of the project by WWF Colombia and the collection of shellfish, as Ecuador was not aware of its existence, and this could cause disinformation within the government. Regarding the point raised by the Secretary General concerning the importance of marine and coastal ecosystems for the mitigation of natural disasters, they agreed with the request of the delegation of Nicaragua to receive support in that effort.

***Meetings and subregional discussions of the Contracting Parties on Wetlands and Development Activities (See annexed documents of North America and the Caribbean, Central America and South America Subgroups).***

**19. Report to the plenary session of the results and proposals derived from the discussions of the subregional groups. *Presentation: Rapporteurs from each subregion***

**Rapporteurs from each one of the Subregions of North America and the Caribbean (Mexico), Central America (Guatemala) and South America (Ecuador) made their presentations (see attached files).**

## **Plenary Discussion**

### **20. Proposals for Resolutions and Recommendations by the Contracting Parties of the Americas for COP10**

#### **Cultural Aspects**

**Mexico** reminded of the motion already introduced, which stresses the need to take into account the definitions and concepts on cultural values as they have been set forth in previous agreements on these matters. This will prevent the countries from dealing with inconsistencies derived from conflicting definitions.

**Venezuela** considered it necessary to make clear that their delegation and those of the South American region are concerned because the elements of discussion do not refer to cultural values but to industrialized processes, such as rice cultivation using pesticides, industrial aquaculture, extractive industries, and small-scale metal exploitation. As a comprehensive document on this topic is not available, the issue is not clearly understood.

**Ecuador** stated that in the typology of cultural values and cultural activities and practices, as set forth in the annex of the document, there is an extremely extensive list of all human activities, which includes activities that cannot be considered as cultural values and that pose a threat to the conservation and wise use of wetlands. Thus, this document is not ready to be accepted. Additionally, the moment has not yet come to share and disseminate the document in a broadly participative process as decided by the Standing Committee during the last meeting for the working group. Thus, the state of this document does not make it suitable for further consultations. Ecuador considered that all the existing difficulties that have been underlined prevent it from processing the matter in the framework of the Standing Committee and its later submission to the Conference of the Parties.

**The Secretary General** intervened to remind that there is a working group at global level which is working on this issue. However, if there is a desire to participate and provide new inputs at a subregional level this could also be organized.

**Brazil** supported the views put forward by Venezuela and Ecuador. It considered that it would be interesting to remind other working groups of the position agreed to by this group in the line that past agreements and resolutions should not be taken up again as this is a very controversial issue that has been extensively discussed during the last two COPs. Thus, Brazil considered that issues that have already been discussed and agreed upon should not be open for discussion again.

**Brazil** believes that the impact on wetlands by some of the development activities should be mentioned again during the plenary session. These activities are already on the list and, for different reasons, they are also considered in the document on culture. However, they are incompatible and there is no way of including them as cultural activities.

**Argentina** supported and shared the opinions of Brazil, Venezuela and Ecuador emphasizing that even if the role of cultural values is recognized for the management of wetlands, this issue should be handled very carefully in the future, especially considering the discussions during the previous Standing Committee, where a mandate was issued for the working group to prepare a document, a guide and a resolution project aimed at invalidating or improving previously agreed resolutions. As a matter of principle, Argentina believes that its work should not exceed the limits established in the mandate of the Conference of the Parties and that this issue should be handled with great care.

### **Transboundary Wetlands**

**Ecuador** highlighted the statements of the summary presentation by the South American region, reaffirming that for a shared wetland management between two or more Contracting Parties a resolution is not necessary as there are multiple examples of joint work between two or more parties, both with regard to quality and quantity, and this has been the approach by the South American region.

**Mexico** stated that in the North American region there is consensus as to having its own instruments, which allow to direct actions and necessary steps to address the transboundary wetlands issue. In fact, two initiatives have been proposed on which Mexico and the United States are already working. These refer to the issue of the transboundary wetlands at the Río Bravo or the Río Grande. At some point, the possibility exists for working on these issues with Canada and although these are not transboundary wetlands Canada would also enter into the agreement with the United States and Mexico if these wetlands are used by migratory species. As the situation of other countries in Ramsar regions may be different, a resolution may offer a stronger guidance to approach the transboundary wetlands issue. This could be useful and Mexico does not deny the possibility of a resolution in this sense, even if it is not considered as necessary for the North American region.

**Nicaragua** shared the opinion of the other countries on the existence of sufficient tools at international level for the management of natural resources. In Central America there is a Central American Commission for Environment and Development that has taken important steps. Presently, Nicaragua does not consider the issue of discussing spaces of transboundary wetlands. There are many legal tools that have been advanced both in the region and all over the world to consider this type of situations. This discussion should be taken up again later to make synergies with other conventions that already manage this type of issues.

**Venezuela** reviewed the presentation and made a few comments as to the language used for this type of proposals in Venezuela. This is not an obstacle for these experiences and it considered that a specific resolution is not necessary to continue with previous experiences. As stated before, it was highlighted that at international level there have been a few cases where this is really not necessary.

**Guatemala** stated that in principle the need of guidance has been posed in the region for the designation and management of transboundary sites. In the view of Guatemala it is important that the initiative continues receiving support. Although some actions on the issue have already been

undertaken, Guatemala considered that a specific resolution may not be necessary. However, a series of criteria for designation of transboundary sites may be helpful.

**Costa Rica** suggested to recognize that the Central American region has made efforts to identify shared areas and the need to establish guidelines, as proposed by Guatemala. Progress has been made and different shared sites have been identified. It is considered important that additionally to their category as Ramsar sites, at a certain point it is important to recognize the binational interest on protecting these sites. There is a need to continue the work carried out individually by each nation and, at the same time, to strengthen these actions through setting priorities that may arise in the future. These ecosystems have a great importance at the regional level, as they share cultural, geographical and, most importantly, biological aspects.

**Brazil** advised to remember the discussions and differences between the positions of the Contracting Parties during the last Conference of the Parties with regard to the transboundary issue. As this is an extremely delicate issue that is still unacceptable for some of the Parties due to the terms used or proposed, and taking into account that there are already existing instruments and mechanisms, as stated before during this meeting, Brazil considered that there is an interest and spirit of cooperation between the countries and that this issue will not be depended in a single document. Brazil proposed or supported that a sensitive and delicate issue for the Contracting Parties should not be submitted again to the COP.

**El Salvador** expressed that alternative solutions should be formulated with the purpose of collaborating and supporting the subregions. Instead of rejecting alternatives because they may be against the interest of a subregion, solutions have to be proposed to prevent any conflicts. This matter is not of exclusive interest of the Central American region but it concerns Europe, Africa and Asia as well. As a matter of fact, the issue has been transferred in order to consider the possibility of submitting it to COP10 as it is not the exclusive interest of a country or a subregion. El Salvador agreed that the terms are used in this way, according to the South American report and its wording. However, El Salvador considers convenient that Ramsar supports this sort of joint regional actions as shown in the examples of Mar del Plata, Danubio and Lake Titicaca. Possibly the wording has to be changed to allow a message conveying support and interest by COP10, so that the countries will start to work on transboundary wetlands. Thus, it is advisable to consider the way in which they should be treated. The process should continue to allow IUCN to find a more suitable form and a more appropriate wording.

**Guatemala** stated that in Central America the wetlands, transboundary wetlands or shared wetlands have a major significance. The problem is not the term but the fact that biodiversity and water do not recognize borders. As for the management term or the definition of areas, the countries have to agree on shared wetlands. There are more than 12 shared wetlands in Central America (see IUCN study). The Vicepresidents' offices in the Republics of El Salvador and Guatemala have taken actions but this does not mean that Ramsar as the worldwide governing body for wetlands should not take the actions with regard to this matter. The appropriate terms on how to address the issue should be defined.

**Honduras:** supported the motion of the other Central American countries on this issue and reminded that the Convention considers this issue important.

**Nicaragua:** mentioned that the previous remarks on a wetland that has disappeared refer to wetland No. 1135. This has been reviewed several times and its exclusion causes concern. There is additional concern with regard to what could be written after everybody returns to his/her country of origin. Also, the representative of Nicaragua expressed concern and wanted to clarify that Nicaragua does not consider the transboundary issue as a priority for discussion. There are enough tools worldwide to be able to work, but there are even more in Latin America as the Heads of State are increasingly making strong decisions on the environmental issue. They meet frequently in summits, and the officials in the ministries of the countries should be capable of influencing the agenda of their Heads of State to be able to work on the desired issues, such as the issue of the transboundary wetlands in Nicaragua. The country requested that it should be written down that this topic is not important for Nicaragua.

**Guatemala:** declined the proposal.

### **Wetlands and Climate Change**

**Venezuela** stated that the South American region has been discussing the negative impacts on wetlands caused by climate change. However, considering that there are conventions such as the Convention on Climate Change or the Convention on Biological Diversity, Venezuela proposed to advance actions on this topic and recommended to strengthen the synergies between the Ramsar Convention and these Conventions. In addition, Venezuela recommended to strengthen these processes at national level in order to avoid the duplication of efforts.

**Ecuador** considered the statement of Venezuela as a consensus of the South American region as to strengthening the synergies between the Conventions of Ramsar, Climate Change and Biodiversity, as well as regional synergies and of the Parties.

**Cuba** stated that for the Caribbean Subregion the problems related to climate change are most important as a result of the characteristics of these countries. During the subregional meetings the lack of capacities to deal with the effects of climate change has been discussed, including adjustment and restoration measures. Climate change implies habitat fragmentation in wetlands, species extinction and invasive species. The Convention should consider to address climate change on account of the implications for small insular states in maintaining the ecological conditions in wetlands, as well as regarding the implications on the subject of the capacities to deal with this issue.

**Costa Rica** considered that a few actions would be advisable such as carrying out studies that allow to determine the vulnerability to this phenomenon. In addition, Costa Rica as well as Venezuela and Ecuador urge the Secretariat to establish communication with the Convention on Climate Change in relation to designing joint actions between the contracting countries and with other Conventions such as the Convention on Biological Diversity regarding invasive species and monitoring in consideration of the climate change phenomenon. Also, **Costa Rica** recommended the Secretariat to find appropriate mechanisms to carry out an inspection of vulnerable areas considering phenomena related to climate change.

**Mexico** agreed with the three views: strengthening the synergy with the conventions related to global climate change; a closer *rapprochement* between the national focal points of the three conventions (Climate Change, Desertification and Ramsar), especially where the focal points do not belong to the same office (in the case of Mexico, three of the focal points are from the environmental sector while the fourth one is not); also, what Cuba did with regard to the issue is fundamental for small insular countries. In coastal regions of non-island countries the impacts of global climate change are made evident by the rising sea level, as for an example in coastal areas of the Gulf of Mexico. **Mexico** agreed with **Costa Rica** on the need of more precise guidelines to determine which are the most vulnerable wetlands and give special attention to those wetlands that have potential to provide a certain degree of control or adjustment to the effects of global climate change.

**Bolivia** stated that climate change is a priority issue for High Andean Wetlands, as these are fragile ecosystems located in desert or semi-desert areas and thus are subject to a more severe impact by climate changes. In addition, a relationship should be established including follow-up and impact of natural disasters on these ecosystems.

### **Wetlands and Poverty Reduction**

**Venezuela** reiterated what had been expressed in the consensus of the South American region, which stresses the need to implement successful stories which involve local communities in the continuous management of wetlands. **Venezuela** also reiterated the need to consider the possibility of preparing a draft resolution that would include among other objectives the exchange of experiences between all Contracting Parties.

**Ecuador** acknowledged that Venezuela's statement was supported by consensus in the subregion. It also referred to the previously mentioned need to develop indicators to assess the benefits of wetlands conservation for poverty reduction under different management plans.

### **Artificial Wetlands**

**Brazil** expressed the importance of this issue and declared that it would work on a draft Resolution on the issue.

### **Merida Declarations on the Strategy for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Riverine Wetlands of the La Plata Basin, and Conservation, Integrated Management and Sustainable Use of Mangrove Ecosystems**

On these aspects the Senior Advisor for the Americas urged the Parties to develop strategies and to define if they want that Regional Initiatives be recognized in the framework of the convention then it is needed to comply with the stipulated procedures by submitting a joint draft Resolution.

WWF International praised the work and collaboration effort in the development of regional initiatives such as the High Andean Wetlands and CREHO. In addition, WWF praised the new initiative underway for the La Plata Basin and the Central American Policy for wetlands conservation. WWF committed itself to continue supporting the initiative of the High Andean Wetlands and expressed its availability to support the initiative for the La Plata Basin, particularly sharing WWF's work and experience in other basins with similar characteristics.

WWF emphasized the advances made by the High Andean Wetlands initiative working with the private sector with the support and management by the Secretariat. Finally, WWF called on the Secretariat to increase their collaboration in this issue.

## **21. Additional Issues and Other Outstanding Matters**

*Chair: Ministry of the Environment of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela*

**Ecuador** advised to follow the Secretariat's recommendation of submitting in advance, prior to the Standing Committee in June, draft resolutions or any other documents to be approved by the Conference of the Parties. It would be advisable that these documents were submitted by the end of April in order to be included in the agenda and to be considered by the Standing Committee in June.

**Mexico** declared its commitment to pay its outstanding contributions for 2007 by November this year and to pay its outstanding debt by February 2008. Mexico would not support any resolution concerning budgetary issues that mention possible modifications in the contributions, depending on the eventual change in the scale of contributions of the United Nations. This is in order to budget the amount of the contributions correctly and avoid delays in its payments. The amount of the yearly contributions should be defined in the COP and maintained through the corresponding period without modifications.

The **Senior Advisor for the Americas** mentioned the closure of the office of Ducks Unlimited for Latin America and the Caribbean and highlighted the work carried out under the direction of Montserrat Carbonell during more than seven years with important inputs for the Conservation and Wise Use of Wetlands in the region, such as Nariva in Trinidad & Tobago, Pantanal in Brazil, and Dominican Republic, among others. In addition, all participants were provided a document summarizing the work carried out by Ducks Unlimited.

## **22. Presentation and Approval of the Report on the Meeting**

*Submitted by the Ramsar Office (Maria Rivera).*

After three days of intense presentation meetings and discussions in plenary and subregional sessions, the main issues addressed during the meeting are summarized as follows:

### **Technical and Scientific Matters**

North America and the Caribbean prepared a list of priorities (high, medium and low) for the STRP.

#### **High Priority**

1. Climate change
2. Invasive species
3. Water quality guideline
4. Integrated management of coastal zones
5. Underground waters and wetlands

6. Restoration and guideline for the protection against natural disasters
7. Revision of new restoration technologies
8. Inventory and mapping of wetlands
9. Economic valuation of wetlands

#### **Medium Priority**

10. Revision of Ramsar Sites
11. Water quality and wetlands
12. Human health
13. Scientific issues of Resolution 8.45
14. Scientific issues of CEPA
15. Promoting Focal Points for the STRP
16. Facilitating role for Focal Points of the STRP
17. Guidelines for wetlands and agriculture

#### **Low Priority**

18. Meta databases for wetlands inventory
19. Guidelines for wise use
20. River flow regimes
21. Best practices for water allocation

#### **South America**

The possibility of a second regional representative or a substitute in the STRP was discussed.

#### **Central America**

The Wetlands Inventory is a priority for the region and also suggests that the STRP has to work on the development of guidelines for the compensation of wetlands, and not only for Ramsar Sites but also for sites that are outside protected areas. It is recommended that the STRP should also prepare guidelines on good experiences in agriculture, fishing and agricultural industries that are compatible with wetlands ecosystems. Additionally, it is requested that the STRP should work on studies on the effect of single crop agriculture in wetlands, especially those related to biofuels.

#### **Cultural Aspects**

North America and the Caribbean:

The Parties advised to advance carefully towards COP10 and suggested the Secretariat to consider a good strategy to discuss this matter with the Parties and take into account the guidelines established by other agreements (CBD). In addition, it should be mentioned that it is important to ensure that there are no contradictions with other conventions.

Central America:

This issue should be consulted in advance with the Contracting Parties.

South America:

- With regard to cultural issues, the document has some contradictions related to the types of cultural values. Thus, the Parties consider that the document should be analyzed carefully and with certain criterion to make it compatible with the conservation and wise use of wetlands.
- The Standing Committee should send in advance the document to be analyzed in order to discuss it with other relevant organizations in each country and to adopt an official position. It is also necessary to establish a participative methodology, so that the Parties are able to make their contributions when preparing the resolution.

With regard to the Resolution:

- The new resolution cannot invalidate previous resolutions that are the result of many discussions in previous COPs.
- All the Parties of the region agree that the document should not be accepted as it is submitted. It is advised that the contact group in cultural issues should continue working but taking into account the approach of the Convention and the guidance efforts identifying how to address cultural issues in wetlands management.
- The parties request not to advance in the characterization of cultural values.

Other statements made by **Brazil**, **Ecuador** and **Venezuela** in its order that are important to highlight:

The thematic issues that have already been discussed and agreed upon should not be open for discussion again and some of the development activities have an impact on wetlands and these activities are already on the list and, for different reasons, they are also considered in the document on culture. However, they are incompatible and there is no way of including them as cultural activities.

The moment has not yet come to share and disseminate the document in a broadly participative process as decided by the Standing Committee during the last meeting for the working group. Thus, the state of this document does not make it suitable for further consultations.

The South American region are concerned because the elements of discussion do not refer to cultural values but to industrialized processes, such as rice cultivation using pesticides, industrial aquaculture, extractive industries, and small-scale metal exploitation. As a comprehensive document on this topic is not available, the issue is not clearly understood.

## **Transboundary Wetlands**

South America declared that a resolution on this topic is not necessary, and North America and the Caribbean mentioned the existence of instruments to address this issue.

With regard to Central America, it is considered that the region is interested in this issue and also that there are agreements to continue the work started four years ago with the designation of transboundary Ramsar Sites in the framework of the Strategic Plan 2003-2008. It is also requested to develop criteria for the designation and management of transboundary wetlands.

Other comments made by El Salvador, Costa Rica and Brazil were:

El Salvador considers convenient that Ramsar supports this sort of joint regional actions as shown in the examples of Mar del Plata, Danubio and Lake Titicaca. Possibly the wording has to be changed to allow a message conveying support and interest by COP10, so that the countries will start to work on transboundary wetlands. Thus, it is advisable to consider the way in which they should be treated. The process should continue to allow IUCN to find a more suitable form and a more appropriate wording.

Costa Rica stated that there is a need to continue the work carried out individually by each nation and, at the same time, to strengthen these actions through setting priorities that may arise in the future. These ecosystems have a great importance at the regional level, as they share cultural, geographical and, most importantly, biological aspects.

Brazil considered that there is an interest and spirit of cooperation between the countries and that this issue will not be depended in a single document. Brazil proposed or supported that a sensitive and delicate issue for the Contracting Parties should not be submitted again to the COP.

## **Wetlands and Climate Change**

The Parties stated that it is important to have guidelines on the type of wetlands that are most vulnerable to climate change and the measures to protect these ecosystems, as well as to strengthen the work with other Conventions, mainly Climate Change and Biodiversity.

The Parties of Central America and South America request the STRP to work on guidelines to identify the vulnerability and adjustment of wetlands to climate change.

Other comments made by Cuba and Bolivia were:

**Cuba** considers that the Convention should consider to address climate change on account of the implications for small insular states in maintaining the ecological conditions in wetlands, as well as regarding the implications on the subject of the capacities to deal with this issue.

**Bolivia** stated that climate change is a priority issue for High Andean Wetlands, as these are fragile ecosystems located in desert or semi-desert areas and thus are subject to a more severe impact by climate changes. In addition, a relationship should be established including follow-up and impact of natural disasters on these ecosystems

## **Wetlands and Poverty Reduction**

A few countries considered that a resolution highlighting indicators to assess the poverty reduction should be discussed.

Likewise, Central America stated that it is important to work on models involving the communities to achieve a sustainable use of natural resources, ensuring that the development of productive activities are favorable for the populations and for maintaining the ecological characteristics of wetlands.

## **Wetlands and Development Activities**

The South American and Central American region consider that the guidelines and resolutions for SEA and EIA are very important and necessary to prevent negative impacts on wetlands for the development of projects.

## **Other Issues result of the sub regional discussions**

### **Declaration of Merida for the Conservation Strategy and Wise Use of the La Plata River Wetlands**

The representatives from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay agree on setting up a contact group to work on the creation of a Conservation Strategy for La Plata Wetlands. The group will be coordinated by Argentina.

### **Declaration of Merida for the Conservation, Integrated Management and Wise Use of Mangrove Ecosystems**

The representatives from Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela expressed interest in setting up a contact group in order to review and agree on mechanisms and tools to promote the conservation and wise use of mangrove ecosystems. This group will be coordinated by Venezuela with the support of the Ramsar Secretariat.

### **Caribbean Regional Meeting for the Implementation of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands**

The Caribbean Countries tabled that they would meet in Cuba to discuss the formulation of a Subregional Strategy for Caribbean Wetlands, review of experiences in the region regarding the implementation of the commitments agreed to by the Contracting Parties to the Convention and prepare Resolutions and Regional Initiatives for COP10

## **23. Closing Ceremony**

**The Chair** of the meeting thanked all delegates for the active work sessions.

**The Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention** pointed out that ideas, challenges and regional and subregional priorities were brought to the attention of the participants as well as concerns issued by partner organizations of the Convention. New ideas were presented for the future growth of the Convention and in order to respond to the needs of the Convention, steps will be taken to include all these priorities in the global discussion around the Convention. The Standing Committee will be informed on the outcome of this meeting. However, if participants wish

their priorities to be included officially in the global debate they should prepare draft Resolutions while taking into consideration the Ramsar manuals and existing resolutions.

Regarding the deadline for proposals he informed that they must be submitted 40 days before the last Standing Committee it means 22 of April 2008 as the Standing Committee will take place from 2-6 June 2008. About who can present proposals of resolutions he mentioned that any Contracting Party or several or the Standing Committee can present them. He thanked the Venezuelan Government for hosting the meeting and all the facilities for the development of the meeting. He as well thanked the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Norwegian government for the financial support of the meeting and DANONE for the support of the High Andean Strategy meeting.

**Vice Minister for Environmental Conservation, Mr. Miguel Ganardo Rodríguez**

There are many conventions with similar purposes to preserve nature and especially human species, and to ensure future generations a life in the best conditions. And of course, this includes providing quality of life to the present generation.

All current efforts have to be accelerated and as far as possible have to converge for the formulation of policies that will allow to achieve results for those people outside who are waiting for solutions. Community participation and joint decisions together with the communities in regard to these spaces is essential as it definitely will lead to the conservation as well as to the improvement of the living conditions for all people dwelling in these spaces.

Definitely there is one single objective, and that is to preserve the planet and these spaces to ensure its inhabitants a decent life. We are signatories of almost all Conventions related to the topic and we consider that a different society cannot be built without environmental protection. There are three key variables – a moderate economic growth to be controlled without copying consumption models; a moderate equilibrium with social equity; and environmental conservation, as discussed during these days.

Conventions will make sense in the degree in which they reach the people, resolve problems and belong to them and not only to the representatives of the countries. If we do not achieve this we are definitely doomed to disappear as we will only be a group discussing and interpreting issues and looking for solutions that will stay on the walls and in the rooms and will not reach the people. Our great challenge and commitment is with the people, finding concrete solutions to their problems.

Ecuador, Mexico, Cuba and Bahamas thanked the Government of Venezuela and its team as well as the Ramsar Secretariat for this meeting, which concluded successfully.

**CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)**  
**Preparatory Meeting for Ramsar COP10**  
**IV PAN-AMERICAN REGIONAL MEETING,**  
Merida, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, September 18 thru 21, 2007

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