Ramsar visit to the Gulf region, February 2006

16 February 2006

Yemen

United Arab Emirates

Visits to United Arab Emirates (Dubai), Republic of Yemen and the UNEP special session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Forum

During 6 February 2006, the Secretary General visited Nakheel, a key development agency in Dubai, and one interested in ensuring that sustainable wetland issues are incorporated into their developments. An initial meeting with The Nakheel Executive Chairman, H.E Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem, manager research and development, Dr Imad Haffar, general manager, Abdulrahman Kalantar and Benedict Fisher, PR executive, discussed the possibilities for Ramsar site designation of a newly created wetland close to one of the developments, which would also have educational and informative facilities. The fact that UAE has a number of very significant wetlands, especially coastal sites along the gulf coast, was a significant reason for the United Arab Emirates to accede to the Convention, and the Nakheel group agreed to discuss this issue with UAE political figures, so as to see UAE accede, and then follow with nomination of key sites.

The secretary general followed this visit by attending the UNEP Governing Council and Global Ministerial Forum, held in Dubai. During a discussion on the UNEP water programme the secretary general provided the following intervention:

"Mr Chairman,

At its ninth meeting of the conference of the Parties held in Kampala Uganda in November 2005 the Ramsar convention re-iterated its role in integrated management of wetland ecosystems from the mountains to the sea, since the Conventions wetland definition includes also mangrove, sea-grass and coral reef systems. Here, through our joint work programme with the CBD we are able to work closely with Parties to that Convention as well as our own, on issues of biodiversity management in a wetland context.

Reflecting the interconnectedness of all the issues we are discussing, the COP also, for the first time, identified the role of wetland ecosystems in mitigation and restoration for situations of natural disasters, including effects following Tsunami damage, and longer term damage from climate change, and the role of wise use of wetlands in poverty reduction. In that sense, and in concurrence with paragraphs 63 and 64 of UNEP/GCSS.IX/4, and our membership of the EMG and UN-water, we reiterate our commitment to work closely with UNEP on its developing water policy in the framework of the wider UN and multilateral processes.

Thank you, Mr Chairman"

Following the UNEP governing Council meeting, the secretary general visited the Republic of Yemen to discuss the status of the governments' process of accession. The Meeting was chaired by Eng. Mahmoud M. Shidiwah, Chair of the Environment protection Authority, with the presence of Dr. Mohamed S. Ali, Chair of the Environment and Water Committee of the Parliament and the following members of the Committee; Dr. Saleh Ba Asher and Mr. Ali H. Al-Ansae, and Ramsar co-ordinator for the EPA Eng: Abdulghani A. Musaheed. Additional staff from the EPA included Eng: Galal H. Al-Harogli, Coordinator of the CMS, Mr: Sadeq Y. Al-Osaime, manager of the awareness department, Mr: Abdullah s. Al-Sharabie, Legal affairs and Eng. Gamal Al-Harani, with a journalist from the newspaper Al-Thawrah.

During the meeting we examined the issues still needing resolution, and the selection of a suitable first wetland of international importance. Accession is expected to be finalised within 2006, giving impetus to other countries in the region, including Oman, the UAE, Saudia Arabia and Qatar, as well as Ethiopia and Iraq in the wider context. Members of the parliamentary committee were particularly interested to hear of the obligations of the convention as well as benefits. Eng. Musaheed co-ordinated the whole exercise which was extremely successful in clarifying issues around the
accession, and speeding the process onwards. "We look forward to Yemen joining the list of contracting parties soon", said the secretary general.

(L-R) Eng. Mahmoud M. Shidiwah, Chair of the Environment protection Authority, Dr. Mohamed S. Ali, Chair of the Environment and Water Committee of the Parliament, Secretary General, and Eng: Abdulghani.A.Musaeed, discussing the status of the accession process.