Rwanda’s Marshlands Law

14 October 2009

Rwanda

Following the signing of the Memorandum of Cooperation by the General Director of the Rwanda Environment Management Authority (REMA) and the Ramsar Convention Secretary General in May 2008 (here), we are happy to offer our congratulations to the Republic of Rwanda for the elaboration of a draft Law determining the use and management of marshlands of Rwanda. The Bill, which is due to come into force by the end of 2009, has 10 chapters and 90 very comprehensive articles. It makes provision for compliance and enforcement through chapter 9 (violations and penalties) which clarifies among others (i) control and enforcement Authorities, (ii) enforcement powers, (iii) flagrant violations, (iv) prohibitions and sanctions and (v) court authority to levy additional sanctions.

It’s worth noting that the draft law incorporates the Ramsar wise of wetlands principle in the national legislation and is a good example of how an MEA can be embodied in the national environmental legislation.

According to the marshland inventory conducted by REMA, 10.6 percent of the country’s total surface area (278,536 ha) is covered by 860 marshlands. These marshlands are of paramount importance to the nation in terms of the socio-economic support from the resources provided. The marshland resources are responsible for maintaining the extraordinary biological diversity that Rwanda is known for, i.e., Mountain gorillas, Ruwenzori Colobus, etc., as well as supporting the population in their income-generating activities such as agriculture, animal husbandry, tourism, etc.

The main pressure facing the Rwandese marshlands is the rapidly growing population with ever-increasing needs. Dr Rose Mukankomeje, the Director General of REMA, welcomed the development stating that ‘it would help to stop the misuse of marshlands that has been on going for a long time.’

The Ramsar Convention Secretariat is proud to have initiated this project with REMA and FAO, and provided technical guidance and assistance throughout the Bill preparation process.

The Ramsar scientific and technical contributions in the finalization of this Bill, which will make a big difference in the management of these fragile ecosystems, have been provided by Royal Gardener of the Stetson University College of Law (USA) and Ramsar STRP member Carl Bruch and Sandra Nichols of the Washington-D.C.-based Environmental Law Institute (ELI).

After Mauritius, Rwanda is now the second African Contracting Party with which the Secretariat has been collaborating to elaborate national legal instruments for the wise of wetlands.

Once more, the Ramsar Convention Secretariat would like to congratulate the government of Rwanda for this major achievement and urge all other Parties that have not yet done so to follow the example of Rwanda and prepare the legal instruments which are of paramount importance for the wise use of wetlands at national level.

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