World Wetlands Week 2010 Celebration: Victoria, Seychelles

1 February 2010

Seychelles

World Wetlands Week 2010 Celebration

Victoria, Seychelles

31st Jan-5th February, 2010

Following a field mission carried out in early 2009 in Seychelles, a Ramsar team led by the Secretary General met with H.E.M. James Michel, President of the Republic of Seychelles, to discuss the Convention implementation in the country.

The President, who is a former Minister of Environment, explained the importance of wetlands for the islands and the efforts his country has initiated to maintain the ecological character and values of wetlands in Seychelles.

The mission was able to see for itself the political will to manage the wetlands wisely and this was reflected in the field by the implementation of several projects and severe enforcement of the law.

Seychelles gets most of its incomes from the tourism industry through its hotels and wonderful beaches which strongly depend on healthy wetlands.

While other similar islands are offering mass tourism policies, Seychelles have been able to maintain some very high quality tourism by taking into consideration the environment and the ecosystems carrying capacity.

After the visit, the President asked whether it was possible to organize a World Wetlands Week in Seychelles which will make the islands the world capital for World Wetlands Day which is celebrated every 2nd of February in all the 159 Ramsar Contracting Parties.

In one of our last COP resolutions, we have been asked to encourage governments, donors, international organizations, and the civil society at large, including business companies, NGOs and local communities, to join their efforts to stop and reverse the degradation of wetlands in order to sustain the services they provide as a prerequisite for future growth opportunities.

We have therefore accepted to help the government with this project and give it an international dimension.

Our support to Seychelles has the following objectives:

a. Encouraging decision makers, especially business leaders, to develop and adopt policies, strategies and operational approaches according to existing national and international guidelines and standards for ecosystem management, including wetlands, which avoid, remedy or as a last option “offset” adverse impacts on wetland ecosystems, including considering the potential benefits that could be derived from the Business and Biodiversity Offsets Programme (BBOP)

b. Encouraging governments, donors, international organizations, and the civil society at large, including business companies, NGOs and local communities, to join their efforts to stop and reverse the degradation of wetlands in order to sustain the services they provide as a prerequisite for future growth opportunities;

c. Supporting joint efforts between the Ramsar structures and partners and the business sector in building alliances with scientific and research organizations, with a view to improving understanding of wetland ecosystem services, identifying and scaling up solutions, and sharing their tools and experience;

d. Promoting the improvement of environmentally sustainable tourism practices by increasing dialogue and understanding of the socio-economic benefits and business opportunities provided by the ecosystem services of
fully functioning wetland systems.

The event which is to run from 31st January to 5th February 2010 will include the following activities:

1. Sports and leisure (Day 1)
2. Official opening ceremony (Day 2)
3. Visits to wetlands conservation sites and tourism focused activities (Day 3)
4. Culture (Day 4)
5. Wetlands related seminars and workshops (Day 5)
6. Closing ceremony (Day 6)

The following VIPs will deliver key remarks (i) M. Franck Riboud, CEO, Danone Group, (ii), M.Taleb Rifai, Secretary General, UNWTO, (iii) M. Anada Tiéga, Secretary General, Ramsar Convention and (iv) M. Ahmed Djoghlaf, Executive Secretary of the UN Convention on Biodiversity.

This celebration will be an opportunity for the Government of Seychelles to announce the designation of two new wetlands added to the Ramsar List of sites of International Importance. Among these sites is the famous Aldabra Atoll which is already on the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites. The Ramsar SG will hand over the site certificates to the Minister of Environment.

There will be major international media coverage of the event by IPS (www.ips.org) for the anglophone audience and the international French radio network RFI (www.rfi.fr/) will cover the francophone part.

The Ramsar SG visit in Feb 2009 was featured on CNN world report and is available at http://edition.cnn.com/video/#/video/international/2009/06/05/world.report.june.6.09 bk.b.cn

The week celebration will be an opportunity for the Ramsar Secretariat to sign a Memorandum of Cooperation with the United Nations World Tourism Organization to promote sustainable tourism through the wise of wetlands.

This first World Wetlands Week is sponsored by our partner Evian-Danone, the Government of Seychelles as well as numerous local organizations.

The Secretariat intends to hold similar events every year amongst the four regions covered by the Convention.

Related links:
Radio France Internationale: C'est pas du vent
Le point sur les zones humides dans le monde et le rôle de la Convention de Ramsar

Les enjeux des zones humides aux Seychelles
http://www.rfi.fr/contenu/20100128-2-enjeux-zones-humides-seychelles

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