

Welcome Statement on Behalf of the IUCN Director General

Delivered by Mark Smith - Head, Water Programme, IUCN

May 13 2009

Thank you Mr Chairman and Secretary General.

Distinguished delegates, I am very pleased, on behalf of the IUCN Director General Julia Marton-Lefèvre, to welcome you to Gland for this 40th meeting of the Standing Committee of the Ramsar Convention.

For those of you who are returning visitors, you will find comfort – no doubt – in this familiar room, but also see great changes are underway in this building that IUCN shares with the Ramsar Secretariat. For first time visitors, you may be surprised to have come to a Swiss building site for this important meeting. For that, IUCN gives you our apologies – but we assure you that when you return for the 41st meeting next year, the disruption here will be behind us and we will be welcoming you instead to a gleaming new facility.

Of course, this meeting marks the start of a new triennium for Ramsar, and comes after an important 12 months in the conservation and water calendars. The Ramsar Convention sits at the interface of these communities, and appropriately enough, the Ramsar CoP, held so successfully in Korea in November, fell in between the IUCN World Conservation Congress and the recent 5th World Water Forum in Istanbul.

Both events laid out challenges and opportunities for wetlands and their wise use – but perhaps especially the World Water Forum. It was crystal clear in Istanbul that a new generation of investment in water infrastructure development is underway and set to accelerate, in response to a shifting global agenda driven by demand for climate, food, energy and water security.

It is critical that wetlands find a place in this agenda. Wetlands too are infrastructure – they are natural infrastructure that store water, regulate flows and protect the coasts. The challenge and opportunity is to make sure natural wetland infrastructure and its ecosystem services are considered alongside conventional infrastructure options – so that errors from the past that have driven wetland destruction are not repeated – and so that restoration and management of wetlands is recognized as a viable and sustainable option for investment in water infrastructure.

With a body of resolutions now encompassing river basin management, poverty reduction, climate change and a host of other key development issues, the Ramsar Parties are equipped to ensure this is achieved. The great challenge this leaves of course is implementation.

How can the vision of wetland conservation and wise use embodied in these resolutions be implemented on the ground?

There are examples from around the world that should guide Parties on implementation, including from our own IUCN Water and Nature Initiative. At IUCN, as a result, we are looking forward to showcasing our results and especially to now finding opportunities to work with Parties to learn from these and to help in putting them to use.

With that offer, and on behalf of Julia Marton-Lefèvre, I wish you a successful meeting, but above all a productive triennium that succeeds in placing wetlands on the global agenda, and in driving implementation.

Thank you.