

Joint IOP Statement at the 42nd Ramsar Standing Committee

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Opening Remarks

Firstly, we would like to extend warm congratulations to the Ramsar Convention on its 40th Anniversary from all the International Organisational Partners and our associated networks. Since 1971, Parties to the Convention have made significant advances in managing and conserving wetlands around the world. As International Organisation Partners, we are proud to be working in support of the Convention. Our organisations are working actively at local, national, regional and global levels to achieve Ramsar's objectives. From assisting the implementation and development of national legislation to training, field research, water resources planning, awareness-raising and hands-on site management, the IOPs are promoting the conservation and wise use of all wetlands.

History of the IOPs and Ramsar Convention

As well as it being the 40th birthday of the Convention on Wetlands, we recently celebrated the 50th birthday of WWF. WWF was literally “born in a wetland”, Donana marshes in Spain. One person in particular, Dr. Luc Hoffmann was instrumental in bringing about both WWF and the Ramsar Convention – as well as in the earlier development of IUCN and establishment of Wetlands International. The world’s wetlands, and all of us in this room, owe a lot to Luc Hoffmann’s visionary leadership, his innovation, determination and inspiration.

Present challenges and opportunities

Recent events around the world (political unrest and food and fuel price increases) clearly demonstrate that though globalization creates opportunities it also produces rapid and sometimes adverse impacts, especially for the poor. Under such conditions the critical role of wetlands in contributing to peoples’ livelihoods and community resilience needs to be better recognised. We have seen and noted through our programmes around the world that in many places wetlands are a vital lifeline for the poorest in society, providing a critical safety net during periods of turmoil.

Wetlands seem to be more and more at the “front-line” of the key development and security challenges that the world faces. The growing world population (4 billion in 1974 when the Convention came into force; 7 billion today) has increasing demands for food, water and energy, while accessible water supplies, fertile lands, timber, fisheries and accessible energy sources are becoming scarcer. Wetlands are increasingly being targeted for development. In Africa in particular we are witnessing “land grabs” by multi-national companies and foreign governments, which could in fact be more accurately described as “water grabs” that directly or indirectly impact wetlands and their biodiversity. Climate change is adding to all these pressures.

For these reasons and others, we are witnessing an increasing number of developments that directly or indirectly cause the stress on wetlands, including some key Ramsar sites and other wetlands mentioned in Resolution X.13 on the status of sites. Even the Donana marshes, the

informal birthplace of WWF is under intense pressure despite half a century of conservation effort – and we anxiously await the outcome of the recent joint Ramsar/ UNESCO World Heritage advisory mission there. Other cases include oil exploration in the Virunga National Park, Ramsar and World Heritage Site in DRC, the threat of major water diversions upstream of the Inner Niger Delta in Mali, the canal for soy transport draining the Pantanal, dredging of the lower Zambezi for the shipping of coal, sugar cane production in the Tana delta wetlands in Kenya, sodium carbonate mining in lake Natron in Tanzania, palm oil plantation expansion in peat swamp forests in Southeast Asia....the IOPs are very active in trying to tackle these site-based threats. But it is not enough! The Ramsar community as a whole needs to be better prepared strategically, financially and technically to address these trends and to enhance international cooperation in order to address the root causes of wetland loss, for example by increasing our joint efforts to engage and influence the private sector and commodity trade chains in key countries and regions.

Without recognition of the values of wetland ecosystem services by the development sector, these impacts will continue to be disproportionate on biodiversity and the most vulnerable peoples. In this respect the Ramsar Convention must play an even stronger role in catalyzing effective action, through its own mechanisms but also by increasing its influence on other conventions and international policy processes. Recognition of the link between water security and wetlands in CBD is a promising outcome in this respect, and one in which joint action by IOPs alongside the Secretariat and Parties was instrumental. The planned future focus of STRP on valuing ecosystem services, on the relation between wetlands and disasters, energy and poverty is therefore strongly welcomed. The IOPs can add value in all this work by bringing our experience from programmes and supporting effective policy development. One example is the innovative Partners for Resilience programme in which Wetlands International is joining forces with the humanitarian and aid sector to put an ecosystem approach to disaster risk reduction into practice, linked with some vulnerable wetlands in Africa, Asia and LAC.

The IOPs emphasise that international cooperation for wetlands conservation and wise use is needed now more than ever - to secure wetlands, their biodiversity and ecosystem services, as a basis for sustainable development. We take this opportunity to urge the Standing Committee and the next COP to solve the alarming arrears in payments of Parties and to seriously consider the possibility of increasing both the core-budget and the staffing level of the Secretariat, as a special and much needed “birthday gift” to the Convention.

The future- at least another 40 years of partnership(s)

The signature of the new Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) 2011-2017 between IOPs and the Convention Secretariat on Thursday will seal our renewed commitment to keep working with Parties to achieve the Ramsar mission. The Memorandum signals an even stronger intent to plan and implement joint actions that advance international and national Ramsar commitments. The aim of the revised approach is to focus the partnerships and maximise the synergies between IOPs and with the Secretariat, so that by combining our capacities we can be even more effective. The current 5 Ramsar IOPs are also keen to see a broadening of the IOPs over the coming years to include some other key players in wetlands conservation. We hope and expect that the Partnerships Coordinator will play a crucial role in engaging the IOPs and ensuring effective information flows and communications.

Indeed, time is of the essence and we cannot afford discussions and activities that do not move the Convention or its Secretariat forward. The CBD target 10 demands urgent action that uniquely Ramsar can facilitate and deliver. In this respect the IOPs feel that we can't afford to waste years on all that is involved in changing administrations or moving the Secretariat. The real challenge is the continuing loss and degradation of wetlands. Mr Secretary General and other distinguished members of the Ramsar family, you can be sure that today, as well as always, the IOPs are ready to play our part. We look forward to another 40 years of successful collaboration and increased success in addressing the many challenges of wetlands conservation.