

Statement of the IUCN Director General

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Mr Chair, Mr Vice Chair, Secretary General, Distinguished Delegates and Colleagues,

It is my pleasure to speak to you this morning on behalf of the IUCN Director General, Inger Andersen – who sends her apologies that she is not able to join you in person.

On her behalf, I would like to wish you a very warm welcome back to the IUCN Conservation Centre. As always, IUCN is very pleased to host you – in support of our Ramsar Secretariat colleagues – for another meeting of the Standing Committee.

Secretary General – Inger asked that I share with the Standing Committee how much she has appreciated working with you in the months since you came on board. You can be assured of her strong support in your goal of ensuring that the Contracting Parties will be well-served by an effective, efficient and high quality Convention Secretariat.

I would add personally, Martha – and on behalf of many IUCN colleagues who have had the pleasure of working with you before during your time in IUCN and as a member of CEESP – that we are all really happy to have you back, and to know that the Ramsar Secretariat is in such good hands.

Mr Chair – I would like also to re-affirm, on behalf of the Director General and IUCN, our continuing commitment to Resolution XII.4 [Twelve-Four] and its call for close cooperation among the Parties, Secretariat and IUCN in ensuring that administrative arrangements for hosting of the Ramsar Secretariat by IUCN are effective and implemented smoothly. The Chief Financial Officer, the Global Director of Human Resources, the Head of the General Services Unit here in IUCN Headquarters and their respective teams are grateful to the Management Working Group for their on-going support of this shared goal – and they stand ready to assist and advise further as needed.

IUCN is looking forward to renewing our cooperation agreement with Ramsar in our role as an International Organisation Partner. We are grateful to the Secretary General for her recent initiative to bring together the leadership of the IOPs to identify how to strengthen our collective partnership.

As a Union of Member States, NGOs and expert scientific Commissions, we recognise the vital importance of supporting and facilitating cooperation. We are therefore enthusiastic about the potential for joint action among the Secretariat, IOPs and Contracting Parties to deliver critical results for wetland conservation.

It is unquestionable that the cause of wetland conservation and freshwater biodiversity conservation will benefit from more and better cooperation. We know from the data that the challenge we face is simply immense:

- almost one-third of 28,000 freshwater species assessed for the IUCN Red List are categorised as threatened

- WWF estimated that freshwater species populations declined by 81% between 1970 and 2012.
- global extent of inland wetlands declined by 64-71% during the 20th century

– all while

- ecosystem degradation poses a threat to water security for 80% of the world's population

– and

- under business as usual, global water requirements by 2030 are projected to exceed current renewable and reliable supply by 40%.

None of us can tackle a problem of this magnitude alone. And if we are honest with ourselves – in considering those data – despite all of our efforts under the Ramsar Convention and beyond – we are not having impacts at the scale or with the speed needed. How will we change this?

At the IUCN World Conservation Congress last September, in Hawai'i in the United States, a group of IUCN Commissions, Members and IUCN thematic programmes – with the participation also of the Secretary General – came together to ask this question: how can we build action on the conservation of freshwater biodiversity and the sustainable management of water resources at the scale needed? How can we work faster?

It is no revelation that they listed multiple challenges to be overcome. Among them are lack of data, governance, integration of ecosystems in decision making across sectors, the planning and operation of dams and infrastructure, wetland restoration at large scale, and innovation in finance and investment.

But, one underlying problem identified was that the governments, civil society and water resource and wetland advocates committed to action are too fragmented to address a problem of the magnitude and complexity that we face.

When we flex our muscles, we need to flex them together to make sure that we bring our collective strength to bear.

The dialogue in Hawai'i led to a call in the 2017-2020 IUCN Programme for a common framework of action. As a result, we are starting now – under the leadership of the World Commission on Protected Areas, Species Survival Commission, WWF-US and the IUCN Secretariat – to develop a Union-wide strategy for freshwater biodiversity conservation.

We invite everyone to contribute through consultations over 2017. Our aim is to create a platform that will build on all our strengths – so that collectively IUCN Members, Commissions and Secretariat can have impact at the scale and with the speed needed to address the global crisis in freshwater ecosystem health.

We hope that this initiative will contribute to future cooperation with Ramsar – and to the support we as an IOP provide to you as Contracting Parties – as well as in the case of many of you, as IUCN State Members – to achieve the commitments your governments have made to wetland conservation.

In this spirit, we share the conclusion at the recent meeting of the Secretary General and IOP leadership that the Convention will be more successful in achieving its goals if we cooperate on raising understanding of the benefits of wetland conservation and the costs of failure.

We should not lose sight of the fact that the issues at stake are of the highest priority in the global agenda. Just in the Sustainable Development Goals, for example, wetland conservation – because of its direct linkages to both ecosystem health and the economy – contributes not only to water and sanitation but also for example to food security, making cities safe and resilient, decent jobs and reducing inequalities.

The Ramsar community knows this very well. The barrier we face is that others do not.

We agree that now is the moment – as we renew our Memoranda of Cooperation with Ramsar – to work jointly with the Secretariat, our fellow IOPs and Parties to raise the profile of Ramsar and of wetlands. To show how Ramsar is a vital instrument for meeting national and international priorities for development, biodiversity conservation and climate resilience.

Finally – and to close – we in IUCN look forward to supporting your preparations for CoP13, beginning at this meeting – through both support to the smooth operation of the Secretariat and renewed and strengthened cooperation on an agenda for delivering wetland conservation that aligns all of our various strengths for large-scale impact.

I wish you very successful meetings this week.

Thank you.

