

Honourable members of the Standing Committee of the Ramsar Convention, representatives of the Observer States and International Organization Partners, Secretary General to the Ramsar Convention, and other representatives of the Secretariat, Director General of IUCN, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

First of all, allow me to express my sincere gratitude for all the support received in relation to the holding of what I consider to have been a successful COP12 in Punta del Este. Similarly, I would like to thank all of you for welcoming me so warmly as the new Chair of the Standing Committee of the Ramsar Convention.

Our Convention's COP12 played a significant role in increasing public awareness of the environment in general, and of wetlands in particular. It allowed Uruguay to demonstrate to the international community its serious commitment to caring for and developing the environment in line with sustainable production.

The success of COP12, with the approval of 16 Resolutions, is testimony to the great effort and commitment made by all the Contracting Parties as well as the Ramsar Convention Secretariat, in the search for a better and more efficient implementation of the Convention worldwide. These resolutions present new challenges for the creation, review and realignment of management mechanisms. The spirit underlying the way in which they should be carried out so as to ensure the best results for the Ramsar Convention, is summed up in the Declaration of Punta del Este, which expresses the entire Ramsar family's desire to work transparently, with clear rules, for the benefit of Wetlands of International Importance.

The path will not be easy and it will present numerous challenges, which will require our careful attention. The Secretary General's 360° feedback process, initiated within the framework of the 2012-2015 Management Working Group, produced a series of valuable recommendations, the implementation of which will require commitment and effort by all Parties. Institutional strengthening, transparency and efficiency in the management of resources are urgent requirements for achieving the effective conservation and sustainable use of wetlands, things that cannot be achieved without the direct and active involvement of all stakeholders.

At such an important time, it is a great pleasure and honour for me to take on the role of Chair of the Standing Committee, a role that both the country and I myself intend to carry out with the utmost commitment and responsibility.

Allow me to end by reiterating my deep gratitude for being given the opportunity to play an active part in this, the 51st Meeting of the Standing Committee, which we are convinced is the only way to overcome the challenges we face and to progress successfully towards achieving our common goals.

Thank you very much.