

2 February 2001

30th Anniversary of the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

World Wetlands Day

Wetland world - A world to discover!

Message from the Secretary General



The pioneers who managed to bring the representatives of 18 countries to the small city of Ramsar, Iran, on the shores of the Caspian Sea, at the end of a cold month of January in 1971 – at the risk of becoming trapped there by the snow covering the passes back to Teheran on the Elburz Mountains chain – should be genuinely proud of what they accomplished then and there. The Convention on Wetlands was concluded at that meeting on 2 February. Today, 30 years later, the treaty has become an effective instrument, being used by its 123 Contracting Parties to ensure the conservation and wise use of their wetlands.

Sometimes it amazes me how these few pages, with only 12 articles that constitute the text of the Ramsar Convention, have managed to create a worldwide movement to safeguard one of the most productive and significant, and yet threatened, ecosystems of the planet. Because in my view, the Convention on Wetlands goes beyond a typical instrument of international law: it embodies a movement with its very dedicated followers in government agencies, the scientific community, international organizations, indigenous people, national and international NGOs, community-based groups, and even private sector executives! It is in this constituency that rest the vitality and effectiveness of the Convention on Wetlands, a very special feature that needs to be cherished and strengthened, while also respecting at the same time the rules of the game of any intergovernmental treaty.

One hundred and twenty-three member countries, 1044 sites on the List of Wetlands of International Importance covering nearly 800,000 square kilometres of prime wetland areas, a good number of countries with national wetland policies or action plans in place, a significant array of technical and policy instruments developed within the Convention's framework and formally adopted by its Conference of the Parties. This is the reality of the Ramsar Convention today. An encouraging reality.

Yet we cannot relax. Many Ramsar sites are under threat and a considerable number of them do not have effective management plans in place. Some national wetland policies exist only on paper, and the Ramsar Administrative Authority in some countries is too weak to influence the policy and action of other government agencies that *de facto* have the upper hand on the wetland resources in the country.

To address these weaknesses, we need to bring into the Ramsar movement more people and other sectors of society. We need to do more to help people to discover the true value of wetlands and their functions, so that we can count upon more defenders when it comes to electing governments and influencing decisions both on natural resources management and on the investments (or non-investments) that are required to protect them and use them sustainably and equitably.

To this end, we are proposing to focus World Wetlands Day 2001 on the slogan *Wetlands world – A world to discover!*. I encourage you to launch on 2 February 2001 a national campaign to help people to further discover the values and functions of your wetlands, their wetlands, our wetlands. This will be the most effective way to reinforce the wetland movement in each country and around the world. By doing so, you will be making your contribution, a significant one, to maintaining the ecological health of our Planet, our common and, so far, only home.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Delmar Blasco". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Delmar Blasco
Secretary General