



**11th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the
Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)**

“Wetlands: home and destination”

Bucharest, Romania, 6-13 July 2012

Opening Statement by IUCN Director General

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**at the 11th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP11) to the Ramsar Convention on
Wetlands of International Importance
6 July 2012, Bucharest, Romania**

Mr. President of the COP,
Mr. Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention,

Excellencies, Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

The IUCN Director General has been given the honour of speaking at the opening of each of Conference of the Parties of the Ramsar Convention. It is my privilege to carry forward this tradition here in Bucharest, marking, as I think it does, the continuation of now 50 years of partnership between national governments and IUCN in the service of wetland conservation.

It was in November 1962 that Dr Luc Hoffman¹, then Director of the International Wildfowl Research Bureau hosted the conference that made the first call for an international convention on wetlands. The 80 experts who took part in those first discussions asked that “IUCN compile a list of European and North African wetlands of international importance [...] as a foundation for an international convention on wetlands.”

This idea grew into the Ramsar Convention, first signed 9 years later of course, and now with 162 Parties sharing in and benefitting from the original vision of Luc and his friends and colleagues. That original list of ‘wetlands of international importance’ now has 2,040 entries, covering more than 193 million hectares of habitat, for innumerable species.

What a success story for global environmental governance Ramsar is!

Many of you, like me, will have been at Rio+20 – which already feels like history, but was just two weeks ago. Some of you – at least – who were there may have left Rio feeling deflated, because the agreement governments arrived at there was less ambitious or less inspirational than we were hoping for.

¹ Dr Hoffman will receive the 40th Anniversary Honorary Ramsar Award during the opening ceremony.

IUCN's key message in Rio was that nature – not least wetlands – can be a major ally in addressing the world's major challenges, from climate, food and energy security to poverty eradication and economic development and growth.

I think, actually, that Rio+20 produced some vital lessons that should give us hope for more progress. I saw two things in Rio. I saw governments working hard but struggling to find consensus on what it takes exactly to transform sustainable development from aspiration to reality.

But, I also saw local governments, NGOs and businesses showcasing with optimism and enthusiasm their achievements and innovations that are making a difference on the ground – for conservation, for sustainability and, yes, a 'greener' economy.

As one observer put it, sustainable development leadership was found less in the RioCentro, but more outside of it.

Rio+20 was therefore a reaffirmation. It was a reaffirmation that governments should not be expected to make development sustainable by themselves. It takes partnerships – with municipalities, NGOs, farmers, scientists, businesses, and so the list will go on.

This is in fact the history of the Ramsar Convention in a nutshell. Ramsar has grown from the germ of an idea in the minds of 80 experts into a global Convention ratified by 162 countries. Success has come from working together.

The biggest challenge you face is how to implement the Convention on the ground and achieve 'wetland wise use'. The challenge in Rio was the same: how to move from aspiration to implementation. I think the partnership model of the Ramsar Convention should show the way.

As proof, I want to share with you some of IUCN's experience working in partnerships to implement the Convention.

IUCN is working with the Ministry of Water and Environment of Uganda, at the Lake Bisina, Lake Opeta and Lake Mburo-Nakivale Ramsar sites.

Together, we have set up wetland Community Conservation Areas as a means of bringing together communities, local government and the national authorities, to put 'wetland wise use' into action.

This follows a step-by-step process. The partners agree a management plan, local government works to put in place by-laws and communities work to replant vegetation and protect fish breeding grounds.

All are reaping the benefits of recovering water quality, less conflict over water, more sustainable fishing, and biodiversity conservation.

These experiences are important. They may look local, but it is how implementation works. It is exactly these kinds of partnerships that will put the decisions you make this week into action.

We see such successes repeated at many other Ramsar sites where we work. At the Azraq Oasis in Jordan, IUCN works with communities, IUCN Members and partners in government and in civil society to find water management solutions to restore the oasis.

In Tanguar Haor and the Sundarabans in Bangladesh the same approach, ‘co-management’, is key. IUCN works as a facilitator, an advisor, a broker and a convenor of partnerships.

It is the same in the Inner Niger Delta in Mali, Tinkisso in Guinea and the Sourou Valley in Burkina Faso; in Xe Champhone and Beung Kiat Ngong in Lao PDR; in Gandoca Manzanillo in Costa Rica.

I know that the Ramsar Convention’s many partners working with Parties on implementation have similar stories and experiences – whether for example our colleagues from the International Organisation Partners or the members of the World Wetland Network. As they do, IUCN is working with the Ramsar Secretariat to scale up implementation, to bring to bear the evidence and lessons that will help Parties make better policies, wiser decisions and faster progress.

I am encouraged that important examples of the benefits of IUCN’s collaboration with the Ramsar Secretariat will be visible to Parties here this week.

IUCN has worked in collaboration with Ramsar and Danone over the last three years to support the development of the Livelihoods Fund, an initiative now bringing together a coalition of top-level companies to invest in nature-based solutions – including wetland restoration – for sustainable development in marginalised communities. The Fund is leading efforts to restore mangrove forests worldwide, putting partnerships with communities at the forefront.

Working together, IUCN, Ramsar and Danone were successful in developing a methodology for large-scale mangrove restoration that, I hope, with approval now in place from the Clean Development Mechanism of the UNFCCC, will make it easier and give encouragement to Parties to gain new investments in mangrove conservation and restoration.

I also want to encourage Parties to take note of the upcoming TEEB study on Water and Wetlands, which is led by the Ramsar Secretariat in partnership with IUCN, Wetlands International, UNEP and others. ‘TEEB’ is the Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity.

TEEB for Water and Wetlands will join the influential set of TEEB reports, launched over the last 3 years, that are showing policy makers how the wealth of nature underpins our economy. IUCN has been closely involved in the TEEB study since its inception, and led the development of the TEEB for Business report.

TEEB for Water and Wetlands will make the case that wetlands are natural water infrastructure and should be part of any investment strategies for water, food and energy security. I think we shall see that such investment should include implementation of the Ramsar Convention.

I began my remarks by reflecting back 50 years to one small conference that catalysed big achievements in global environmental governance.

I am very proud as IUCN Director General that IUCN has played its part in the development and implementation of the Ramsar Convention – as well as in other significant milestones in global conservation, including the adoption of the Convention on Biological Diversity, CITES, World Heritage Convention, and many regional environmental agreements.

Our commitment to working in partnerships with you as Parties and others continues. We will champion the Aichi Targets in the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity and I urge all of you to do the

same. We will work with CBD, Ramsar, governments and our incredible networks of IUCN Members and of scientists to achieve impacts on the ground, to do our utmost to turn aspiration into reality.

Your negotiations in Bucharest this week will include the question of who will host the Ramsar Secretariat in the future. To close my remarks today, I want to take the opportunity to reiterate to all Parties what I have said to the Ramsar Standing Committee over the last three years. This is that IUCN is strongly committed to continuing to host the Ramsar Secretariat at our Conservation Centre in Switzerland.

It remains a privilege for IUCN to support the evolution and implementation of the Ramsar Convention. We will continue to do so regardless of administrative arrangements. We fully respect that the decision on the future administration of the Secretariat rests solely with the Parties – but I do firmly believe that hosting of the Ramsar Secretariat by IUCN strengthens implementation of the Convention.

As a Union of governments, NGOs and volunteer scientists, IUCN is the right platform for Ramsar to work with the partnerships of governments, civil society and scientists that are vital to saving the world's wetlands.

As we witnessed in Rio, it is exactly these partnerships that will be needed to turn the world's aspirations for sustainable development into results on the ground.

The first opportunity to do so will be at the upcoming IUCN World Conservation Congress, which will take place on the island of Jeju, Republic of Korea, in September. The theme of the Congress, *Nature+*, captures the fundamental importance of nature and its inherent link to every aspect of our lives.

You will be all very welcome in Jeju.

As the first major event in the Rio+20 implementation phase, the IUCN Congress will provide the “how” to the Rio+20 question of “what” to do about sustainable development.

Ramsar is already showing the way.

And I hope that our discussions this week will help secure a better future for wetlands, for people and nature – a truly sustainable future we want.

Thank you for your attention and I wish you a successful Conference.