

## **Statement by IUCN Director General Julia Marton-Lefèvre at the 43rd meeting of the Standing Committee of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands**

1 November 2011, Gland, Switzerland

Thank you Mr. Chair,  
Distinguished Members of the Standing Committee,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my pleasure to again have the opportunity to welcome the Ramsar Standing Committee to the IUCN Conservation Centre. It was of course only six months ago, in May, that we last gathered here and I look forward to seeing you here on many future occasions.

As we approach the 11th Conference of the Parties, to be held in Bucharest in June 2012, the work of the Convention is intensifying.

This meeting of the Standing Committee is arguably the most important of the three-year cycle of Ramsar Convention business. You will set in place a slate of Draft Resolutions for COP 11 and thereby begin building the agenda for Bucharest. It is here, this week, that you will begin to draw to a conclusion the work of the Convention since 2008 and set priorities for the next triennium, to finish in 2015.

Your decisions this week will be instrumental in ensuring that the work of the Convention is focused correctly through 2015 on the most critical and pressing actions needed for implementation of the Convention.

Parties will also continue their dialogue here on the future administration of the Ramsar Secretariat. In my remarks to the Standing Committee in May I tried to state very clearly IUCN's position on hosting of the Ramsar Secretariat. That is that:

- IUCN is strongly committed to continuing to host the Ramsar Secretariat here at the Conservation Centre in Gland.
- The hosting of Ramsar 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 in partnership with governments, civil society and scientists to save the world's wetlands. I remind you that IUCN has an Intergovernmental Organization status with the United Nations.
- As an institution that has been at the origin of major biodiversity-related MEAs, IUCN is delighted to see increased collaboration among these conventions, including Ramsar, which occurs regardless of hosting arrangements.
- And finally, IUCN fully respects that the decision on the future administrative arrangements for the Secretariat rests solely with the Parties. IUCN's interest – in common with all Parties – is that the current uncertainty in this regard is put to rest as rapidly as possible.

It remains a privilege for IUCN to support the evolution and implementation of the Ramsar Convention. We will continue to do so regardless of the outcome of your deliberations in this respect, but I firmly believe that the current arrangements are best for the Convention.

I wish to congratulate therefore the Chair of the Standing Committee's Ad Hoc Working Group on Administrative Reform, Mr. Mohammad Koba of Indonesia, for his diligence in ensuring that, since the last meeting of the Standing Committee, the tasks of the Working Group were brought efficiently to completion.

I would also like to urge Parties to use this meeting and the upcoming COP to make a final decision, so that the focus of the Parties and the Secretariat can return fully to where it should be: to implementing the Convention for the benefit of biodiversity and sustainable development and all of humanity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

2011-2020 is a big decade for biodiversity, and 2012 will be a big year for the environment and sustainable development.

In addition to the Ramsar COP next June, the world will reconvene in Brazil for the twentieth anniversary of the Rio Earth Summit.

Just three months later, the global conservation community will gather on the Island of Jeju in the Republic of Korea for IUCN's own World Conservation Congress.

The IUCN Congress, in turn, will be an essential bridge to the 11th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Hyderabad, India, in October 2012.

As I mentioned earlier, this meeting of the Ramsar Standing Committee will be instrumental in setting the agenda for the Convention all the way through to 2015. This date has added significance that I wish to encourage Parties to keep at the forefront of your deliberations.

In October 2010, Parties to the CBD adopted the landmark Strategic Plan for Biodiversity, including 20 so-called Aichi Biodiversity Targets for 2020. The end of Ramsar's next triennium in 2015 will mark the half-way point for the Aichi targets.

The Aichi Targets are highly ambitious. They reflect the urgency of the biodiversity crisis that the world faces today. If we don't reach these targets in time – by 2020 – we have no doubt that the biodiversity crisis will become even more grave and more costly to humanity.

At the time of adoption of the Aichi Targets, Ramsar joined all of the biodiversity-related Conventions in committing to working jointly to help achieve them. In beginning now, at this meeting, to set the agenda for Ramsar leading to 2015 I urge all Parties to bear this in mind: we cannot risk getting to 2015 only to realize then that we are not moving fast enough or achieving real improvements on the ground for biodiversity.

The Ramsar Convention is tailor-made to drive forward action on Aichi Target 14, which calls for restoring and safeguarding, by the year 2020, ecosystems that provide essential services, including those related to water.

I am impressed that in the papers for this meeting there are proposals to ensure alignment of Ramsar's own Strategic Plan to this and the other targets. I am pleased that IUCN has been able to support this step – and coherence among all the biodiversity-related Conventions – by mapping out our own synergies with the Aichi Targets.

I would respectfully urge Parties, however, that this does not go far enough. We need to look at all of the Draft Resolutions to be reviewed here through the lens of the biodiversity crisis and ask whether they measure up to the goals our countries agreed for 2020:

Are all of the key drivers that will stop us ‘restoring and safeguarding’ wetlands addressed?

Will progress be fast enough?

And most critically: Will commitments made under the Ramsar Convention be turned into national action that is underway by 2015?

IUCN will continue to do its utmost to support Parties and the Ramsar Secretariat in helping to make sure that words are turned into action, and quickly. In May, all of the International Organisation Partners signed a new, joint Memorandum of Cooperation with the Convention. Since then, the relevant programmes of IUCN and the Secretariat have drafted a joint workplan. We will work together, for example, on:

- mapping freshwater species to support national wetland inventories;
- capacity building for Parties on wetland policies and on protected area management effectiveness;
- using evidence for good river basin management in national action plans for water; and
- jointly promoting use of wetlands as natural infrastructure for climate resilience.

I am especially pleased that IUCN and Ramsar are collaborating, alongside Wetlands International, on setting up a new TEEB Study on Water and Wetlands. The Study will be partly funded by IUCN’s Water and Nature Initiative. It will provide state-of-the-art evidence for the value of wetlands as natural infrastructure for economic development and for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. It will deliver a clear, science-based message into the dialogue leading up to Rio +20 that without investment in the natural water infrastructure provided by the world’s wetlands, there will be no ‘Green Economy.’

Mr. Chair, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The urgency of action needed on the biodiversity crisis is real. The governments of the world agreed in 2010 that there is no time to waste. Ramsar has a golden opportunity now – with the work starting at this meeting and then in Bucharest in 2012 – to put in place the agenda for global and, critically, national action on wetlands that will be vital in meeting the 2020 Aichi Targets.

Thank you for your attention and I look forward to participating in your discussions.