

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)
46th Meeting of the Standing Committee
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Draft IOPs' statement for the Ramsar Convention's 46th Standing Committee meeting

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Thank you for this opportunity to address the Standing Committee on behalf of the five International Organization Partners: BirdLife International, IUCN, The International Water Management Institute, Wetlands International and WWF.

We would like to offer congratulations to those countries that have designated new Ramsar Sites: 58 have been designated since COP 11, covering almost 13,000 hectares. Ramsar Sites are an important component of the Convention: they make it tangible and importantly they promote local involvement. Yet the same Standing Committee document that describes this good progress lists 147 Sites that fall under Article 3.2 or are on the Montreux Record, and are therefore at risk of a change in ecological character. This highlights the value and importance of Ramsar Advisory Missions as a key instrument of the Convention that can help address these threats. The Hawizeh Marshes in Iraq, Doñana National Park in Spain and Virunga National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo all present a major opportunity for Ramsar to team up with the UNESCO World Heritage Convention to help safeguard these invaluable wetlands.

Moreover, Ramsar is not just about the jewels in the crown but about all the wetlands that provide a crucial resource base for sustaining the world's ecology and economy. Wetlands are still degrading and being lost faster than any other habitat, especially where human populations are increasing and where pressure for economic development is greatest. Decisions made for short-term expediency may not be wise ones in the long term. Panama Bay is an example, where pressure for economic development in the capital is threatening a hugely important Ramsar Site. We welcome the Panama Supreme Court's decision last week to reinstate the Protected Area status of the wetlands, which is the first step towards a positive outcome. However, it is disappointing to learn that the Administrative Authority still has plans to change the Ramsar Site boundaries, putting under threat one of the top five stop-over sites in the Americas for migratory shorebirds.

How can Ramsar best address these challenges? The message we want to convey today is about the importance of communicating, integrating and building bridges. Bridges between local and national plans and actions, between governments, the private sector and NGOs, and between the different social and economic sectors that make up society.

We believe that Ramsar needs to build on its successes to date and become an even more relevant and effective force: understanding the actual impacts and trade-offs associated with different wetland uses, tackling the issues that impact wetlands – and for which wetlands can provide solutions. The Convention has a comprehensive and well-structured Strategic Plan to guide Parties to deliver its objectives, and it has accumulated and is sharing a wealth of practical experience on wetland management. A next strategic step, as discussed at the last COP, is to invest in even stronger political coordination. The Convention needs to find the best way to engage high level decision makers and increase its visibility and stature for better results. The

proposed High Level Ministerial Segment at COPs can contribute to this, but this is not the only option.

The Ramsar community needs to participate fully in the processes to develop the Post-2015 Development Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals, in order to ensure that wetland ecosystem services and biodiversity are recognised as essential assets underpinning sustainable development. Ramsar's voice – Secretariat and Parties - should be clearly heard in national and international consultations, particularly on water-related discussions.

Similarly we call for a robust engagement with the Intergovernmental Panel for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), as well as a strong and active participation in the next World Parks Congress scheduled for November 2014 in Australia.

We call on Parties to develop appropriate national and local mechanisms to make wetlands a central part of strategic cross-sectoral planning; with plans reflecting the values of natural capital and of the short- and long-term benefits that wetlands deliver to society if used wisely. Engagement with national implementation strategies to meet the Aichi Targets are one of several such opportunities.

Clearly this is a challenging task, as policy processes generally reflect a short-term vision only. This needs to be changed and actions to do this must begin at home. At the national level, we encourage Parties to take concrete approaches to build synergies among Multilateral Environmental Agreements. We've seen some positive experiences, but all too often institutions are working in isolation for objectives that are in fact shared. Actions and efforts need to be shared as well. Stronger coordination among focal points of Conventions and Agreements is a first step to developing stronger links across all Government sectors, so as to build truly integrated policies and plans where environmental issues are mainstreamed.

While seeking greater political ownership and uptake of actions outlined in Ramsar's Strategic Plan, we should not lose sight of the Convention's technical and science based approach, with tangible implementing and monitoring mechanisms and the applicability to a wide community. The practical steps being taken by the Ramsar Secretariat to implement the new reporting framework and the STRP review, as agreed by the last COP, are welcome and we wish to see, and support, continued rapid progress on these fronts.

As IOPs we will continue building partnerships, developing resources and innovative projects to demonstrate application of Ramsar principles to conservation and sustainable development.

Last but not least, we want to take this opportunity to recognise the contribution that Anada Tiega has made during his tenure as Secretary General and to thank him for all his efforts on behalf of the Convention. As IOPs, we thank him particularly for his inclusive and welcoming approach and excellent rapport with our organisations. We wish him well and look forward to continuing such a good and open relationship with the next Ramsar Secretary General.