

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)
46th Meeting of the Standing Committee
Gland, Switzerland, 8th – 12th April 2013

Opening Statement by IUCN Deputy Director General / Managing Director, Poul Engberg-Pedersen

Mr Chair, Madame Vice Chair, Secretary General, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity for IUCN to once again address the opening of the Ramsar Convention Standing Committee.

On behalf of IUCN Director General Julia Marton-Lefèvre, it is my pleasure to welcome you all this morning – welcome back to those of you who are regulars at the Standing Committee, and an especially warm welcome to those of you who are taking part for the first time.

I assure you that for IUCN, it is a continuing honour to host you in the Conservation Centre that we share here in Gland with our colleagues from the Ramsar Secretariat.

Among those of you we are welcoming for the first time is our Chair.

Dr Faca – both the Director General and I are looking forward to working closely with you over the coming three years to make sure that your work and the work of the Ramsar Secretariat have the best possible support from IUCN.

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This Standing Committee meeting marks the formal start of another triennium of work of the Ramsar Convention, following the 11th meeting of the Conference of the Parties held in Bucharest in July last year.

It is the right moment then to ask ourselves, what will be the results from these three years of work? What do you, the Contracting Parties, want to use this triennium for? What are the partners and stakeholders in the Ramsar Convention hoping to achieve? What does the cause of wetland conservation and sustainable development – or Ramsar's concept of 'wetland wise use' – need now?

What aims and ambitions should this Standing Committee set for itself?

The answers to these questions, as Parties, are yours to give. But, we want to make some propositions.

Of course, this Committee has an important task in overseeing the administration of the Convention, including preparing for the next COP. This work is not to be underestimated, but Ramsar – and I would say too, the MEAs in general – cannot afford business as usual.

We need to see the policy agreed by Ramsar Parties deliver results on the ground.

In the conservation world, the CBD Strategic Plan for Biodiversity is providing a focus for action – including Target 14 of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, under which ecosystems providing essential services, including water services, are to be restored and safeguarded by 2020.

In the development arena, the process for agreeing the post-2015 development agenda is underway now, including advocacy for a specific, post-MDG development goal on water and water resources. Many governments are strongly supportive, and if this effort succeeds, then national-level action that delivers results will come under the spotlight.

And there are the Sustainable Development Goals – which have the potential to bring development and biodiversity goals into alignment.

It is IUCN's view that the Ramsar Convention can help to shape the success of these global processes. Ramsar can play a pivotal role in mobilising national action on wetland, water resources and development that will be vital for the Aichi Targets, the post-2015 development agenda and the SDGs.

This will not be business as usual – but we think it should be the business of Ramsar in this triennium. So our role should be pushing for results on the ground, not just overseeing the Ramsar administration.

Ramsar Parties have put in place – through the Resolutions you adopted in Bucharest and at the preceding Conferences of the Parties – a very valuable framework for policy. You have agreed Resolutions that establish the Ramsar Convention and wetland conservation as integral to action on, for example:

- poverty eradication
- climate change mitigation and adaptation
- human health
- sustainable energy
- water security through sustainable river basin management

These policies are in place at the intergovernmental level. The opportunity now is to translate them to the national level – to use what you have adopted in the Ramsar Convention as a guiding framework for national policies that achieve results on the ground.

This, after all, was the intention when these Resolutions were adopted. How then can we speed up the process of turning Ramsar's policy framework into national action? How can we make Ramsar more effective as a building block for governments to achieve results for biodiversity **and** for the upcoming post-2015 development agenda?

I would like to propose that implementation of the Ramsar Convention will be more effective if the Parties, Secretariat and IUCN and the other International Organisation Partners develop much closer and more strategic cooperation. We should join forces to address the barriers to stronger national implementation. We should work together on concerted national implementation initiatives, for example to:

- build skills and capacities in not just wetland management, but also how to invest in wetlands for their development benefits
- convene national dialogues, on integration of wetland policies across sectors

- apply wetland and water resources information to national programmes for wetland conservation and restoration
- promote new investment in wetlands as critical national water infrastructure.

By Contracting Parties, Secretariat, IUCN, IOPs and other partners working on joint strategies at national level, we will find synergies that until now we have been missing.

By making sure that implementation initiatives are focused on using Ramsar's policy framework to deliver results at national level – for the Aichi Targets and for the future development agenda – we believe this will open new and previously untapped potential for fundraising for the Ramsar Convention.

To succeed, however, we will have to work in this triennium to deepen our cooperation. I want to invite all Contracting Parties and IOPs therefore to work with the Secretariat and IUCN to create a joint strategy for national implementation initiatives – and to then work on mobilising the new investments that will be needed to deliver on the promise of Ramsar's foresighted framework for policy on wetlands and water.

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Before closing, I want to express to you our appreciation of your decision in Bucharest to renew your confidence in IUCN as hosts for the Convention Secretariat. The IUCN Director General takes very seriously the expectations placed on IUCN by Parties in Resolution XI.1.

This Resolution requested the Standing Committee to establish a mechanism to ensure that the Ramsar Secretariat is optimally supported by IUCN. Having consulted with the Secretary General, we suggest that IUCN and the Ramsar Secretariat set up a small group consisting of three persons from IUCN and three from the Secretariat to evaluate the existing arrangements and to make suggestions to the 47th meeting of the Standing Committee on ways of building on and improving the operations of the Ramsar Secretariat in order to enhance the implementation of the Convention.

My final message to you is that IUCN is greatly looking forward to working with you in this new triennium for the Convention.

We believe the time is right to leave business as usual behind and to set in place action on implementation that will see this Convention fulfil its promise as a catalyst for delivering results for conservation and for development.

Before I finish, I will take one moment to acknowledge our Secretary General.

Anada, on behalf of all your colleagues at IUCN, thank you for your contributions to our community – and thank you especially for your wise leadership of the Ramsar Secretariat over these last five years. We have enjoyed working with you and collaborating with you – and we wish you the best for what will come next for you.

Mr. Chair, thank you.

I wish you all a successful Standing Committee.