

World Wetland Day 2008 **A Message from the Secretary General**

World Wetlands Day provides all of us with an opportunity to join together with our colleagues around the world to celebrate the benefits that we all receive from wetlands, and to help raise the awareness of our fellow citizens about the importance of these vital ecosystems for our common future.

Whether we are talking about swamps and bogs, peatlands, rivers and lakes, estuaries and coastal zones, coral reefs or rice paddies, we understand that wetlands are essential for the supply of fresh water, maintenance of biodiversity, mitigation of the effects of climate change, groundwater recharge and flood control - and so many other so-called "ecosystem services" - and we want to get that message out to decision-makers and citizens in our communities.

Each year since the first World Wetlands Day, in 1997, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, with the generous support of the Danone Group, has produced materials that are meant to help everyone planning awareness activities to liven up their events with our posters, stickers, information sheets, animations, and so on. And each year we have tried to bring a timely focus to the events by suggesting a unifying theme to highlight some particular aspect of the wetland message.

For this year, 2008, we have suggested the theme of ***Healthy Wetlands, Healthy People***, an especially appropriate one for us because that will also be the theme for Ramsar's 10th meeting of the Conference of the Parties later in the year in the Republic of Korea.

We hope that the materials we are providing this year will help to introduce to the Ramsar community, and the people you reach out to, a few key topics that show both the direct, positive effects on human health of maintaining healthy wetlands - such as the provision of food, clean water, pharmaceutical products, etc. - and the direct negative effects of mismanaging wetlands that can result in harm to our health and even the loss of life - such as through the effects of water-related diseases, burning peatlands, floods, and water pollution.

We are trying to emphasize that the strong relationship between healthy functioning wetland ecosystems and human health underlines the huge importance of management strategies that support both the health of wetlands and the health of humans. And that the costs of poor management can be high - wetland-related

diseases, for example, claim the lives of more than 3 million people every year and bring suffering to many more.

We in the Ramsar Secretariat wish all of you a successful World Wetlands Day, whatever you may be planning to do for the occasion. And, of course, as always, we thank you sincerely for all of your efforts on behalf of the health of the world's wetlands.

Mr Anada Tiega
Ramsar Convention on Wetlands