

News Release

Amman 2000 World Conservation Congress comes to a conclusion "No loss of species is acceptable," says IUCN

"We develop our beautiful planet in such a way that we brush aside the species... that we risk creating a wasteland, where our aspirations will ultimately wither and die," cautions Her Majesty Queen Noor of Jordan, Patron of IUCN.

Amman, Jordan, October 11, 2000 (IUCN) - The IUCN World Conservation Congress, held in Amman, Jordan, between 4 and 11 October 2000, reported that the loss of biological species has assumed dramatic speed and magnitude as more species move into the critically endangered category or go extinct. Overall at least 11,000 species are threatened with extinction according to IUCN's Species Survival Commission (see www.redlist.org). Scientists believe that hundreds of thousands more are at risk.

The world's largest environmental gathering in the year 2000 sought ways to fight the extinction crisis, now threatening future human welfare. The Congress concluded its 8-day session with the approval of an ambitious new IUCN Action Plan and Programme, to combat the intertwined problems of species loss and ecosystem integrity.

"We have the knowledge, technology and human resources to avert the extinction crisis. What is missing is the political commitment to use them and to invest in them in the interest of future generations. No loss of species is acceptable to IUCN – no species should go extinct," said IUCN Director General Maritta von Bieberstein Koch-Weser.

Delegates from 143 countries in IUCN's unique partnership between government and civil society, together with representatives from its network of 10,000 scientific experts from 181 countries, agreed on an innovative programme of action across countries and in the oceans, to save terrestrial and marine ecosystems and help stem the rising tide of extinction.

The loss of species is a form of environmental degradation mankind can never mend again. Climate change threatens to drive this loss even faster. Participants emphasized that unless these two threats are addressed vigorously now, a future world population, which will reach 8 billion in the next quarter century, will suffer misery, disease, conflict and poverty beyond anything we know today.

"Every time we lose a species we break a life chain which has evolved over 3.5 billion years," says Jeff McNeely, IUCN's Chief Scientist.

Causes for Environmental Degradation

The extinction of species and the loss of habitats are inseparable. According to IUCN's President Yolanda Kakabadse, *"Species disappear as the ecosystems they live in are destroyed. Desertification is accelerating through over-consumption of water and land, forests are disappearing through logging and development activities – 200 million hectares, an area twice the size of South Africa, have been lost over the past 15 years – and seas are seriously over-fished and increasingly polluted."*

Participants highlighted diverse driving forces behind the degradation of the environment – population growth, poverty as well as wealth, greed and the loss of indigenous knowledge systems. Together they contribute to an escalation of resource exploitation and spiraling environmental destruction.

"We are losing some of our only planet's resources forever, because we do not sufficiently assist the poor of this world. And yet, we have far greater riches and more global food supplies than any generation before us," said Mr. Maurice Strong, Secretary General of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, in his opening speech of the IUCN World Conservation Congress.

"Poverty must not be overlooked in conservation: the poor will not conserve species at the expense of their lives. Africa must be assisted to fully identify and know its biodiversity and be able to earn benefits from it with dividends flowing right back to the poor. IUCN can lead that noble cause", said the Hon. Dr. Kezimbira Miyingo, Minister of State for Environment of Uganda.

Transboundary Management of Ecosystems

Her Majesty Queen Noor opened the Congress with a compelling speech on the importance of ecospace-based environmental co-operation, as the major theme of the Congress and a subject most vital to the Middle East.

"All our international institutions are based upon the existence of national borders. But sustainable use of natural resources will only work if nations cooperate in a spirit of good environmental neighbours", says Maritta von Bieberstein Koch-Weser, Director General of IUCN.

The Congress considered trans-boundary management of ecologically interconnected spaces as a cornerstone of the environmental agenda – above all for the sustainable management of scarce water resources, river basins, regional seas, underground aquifers and for international species protection programmes. Important examples are the Arctic, the Mediterranean, and major river basins such as the Mekong, the Danube, the Amazon, and the Zambesi.

Other prominent figures who spoke at the Congress and associated events included Mohammed Halaikah, Deputy Prime Minister of Jordan, Klaus Toepfer, UNEP Executive Director, Maurice Strong, Chairman of the Earth Council, Klaus Schwab, President of the World Economic Forum, Jose Maria Figueras Olson, former President of Costa Rica, Elizabeth Odio, Vice-president of Costa Rica, Maureen Marlowe, Director of Reuters Foundation, Yasuo Goto, Chairman Emeritus of Keidanren (the Japanese Chamber of Commerce), and Ralph Petersen, CEO of CH2M-Hill. The Congress was attended by 13 ministers from several IUCN-member countries.

Programmes and Resolutions adopted

Responding to the challenges ahead, governments and civil society organizations adopted a new Programme Framework together with over 100 specific resolutions that will shape IUCN's environmental agenda for the years to come. The new Programme committed the Union to seven Key Result Areas spanning a wide range of actions from ecosystem management and restoration to information management and better governance. The resolutions address issues such as:

- *Linking climate change to biodiversity* to ensure that reforestation activities designed to prevent global warming also give due consideration to critical biodiversity and habitat issues;
- Initiation of a *Global Theme Programme on the Conservation and Management of Arid and Semi-Arid Lands*. It will promote co-operation of IUCN's membership with the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.
- Development of *comprehensive approaches to conservation of marine ecosystems*, including species-protective measures such as controlling over-fishing, and reducing the loss of seabirds and turtles to long-line fishing;

- Identification of *protection measures for specific ecosystems (such as Mountains, Temperate and Boreal forests (especially in Russia), and for the Arctic and Antarctic, the cradle of rivers in Asia, the Parana River, Mesoamerican Biological Corridor, the Mekong basin, the Baltic Sea, the Guyana Shield, and others)*;
- Identification of *protection measures for individual species*, such as tigers, black rhinos, marine turtles, Tibetan antelopes, Dugong, and several bird species, including the Okinawa Woodpecker, the Okinawa Rail – and of particular interest to the Middle East host region – the Houbara Bustard and the Saker Falcon;
- Guidelines for the *prevention of biodiversity loss caused by invasive alien species*;
- *Addressing corruption*, especially in the forest sector, by promoting good governance, transparency, democratic processes, human rights and other fundamental components of good environmental stewardship;
- Better understanding of the relationship between *security and environmental degradation*, including conflict avoidance and improved international co-operation to prevent and mitigate the impact of natural disasters;
- Establishment of a *task force on large dams, people and the environment*;
- Improved distribution of real-time *environmental information* through the use of cutting-edge technology.

On its final day, the Congress adopted a motion to secure the environment of the Gaza Strip, West Bank and Jerusalem. This called for support for all peaceful efforts to bring the violence to an end and to protect the environment.

New Initiatives Launched

The gathering also led to important new initiatives – direct actions in furtherance of IUCN's mandate:

The *Earth Forum* was launched jointly on October 4 by Maurice Strong, as Chairman of the Earth Council, and Maritta von Bieberstein Koch-Weser, Director General of IUCN, as a new platform for dialogue between the community of environmental institutions on the one hand, and private sector and other major decision makers on the other. The 1st Earth Forum was chaired by Dr. Klaus Schwab of the Davos World Economic Forum.

IUCN and Spain agreed to open an *IUCN office for the Mediterranean* in Málaga, as a platform for interconnecting and supporting the work of NGOs and governmental agencies to preserve a broad range of Mediterranean ecosystems. This promises to become a major focal point for environmental action, especially in North Africa and the Middle East.

A US\$ 30-million *Water and Nature Initiative* was launched, focusing on restoration, protection and management of ecosystems that provide water and livelihoods to communities, with a strong backing from the Government of the Netherlands.

IUCN and Jordan agreed to establish a *thematic centre on water* to specifically address water issues in the Middle East. IUCN and Jordan are committed to the goal of making water a source of peace - not conflict. The Jordan Thematic Centre on Water reaffirms the determination of the Jordanian Government to ease conflict through trans-boundary co-operation in the management

of scarce resources, as Mohammad Halaikah, Deputy Prime Minister of Jordan, stated at the opening ceremony.

GLOBE (Global Legislators Organization for a Balanced Environment) and IUCN signed a *Memorandum of Understanding to more effectively provide parliamentarians and legislators with accurate environmental information*. According to Akiko Domoto, president of GLOBE, Vice President of IUCN and Member of Parliament of Japan: *'As parliamentarians, we consider this alliance to be very important, especially because we are the ones who are going to ratify conventions and define the environmental policy in each country'*.

The "Peace Parks" initiative was affirmed as a valuable contribution to co-operation and peace between neighbouring countries. There are currently over 130 trans-boundary marine and terrestrial protected areas that could benefit from the Peace Parks Programme.

The *Ombudsman Center for Environment and Development (OmCED)*, under the shared responsibility of the Earth Council and IUCN - at the Amman Earth Forum, was launched as a new international environmental conflict resolution facility.

Her Majesty Queen Noor launched *"Friends of IUCN"*, a network of key leaders committed to the cause of the environment, who will assist IUCN in implementing its mission. Queen Noor said: *"Friends of IUCN will provide a window for substantive dialogue, much like an advisory think tank, to develop even more fully IUCN's potential as the world's foremost umbrella organization of environmental institutions and experts."*

Under the Chairmanship of Maurice Strong and Yolanda Kakabadse, *The Earth Charter* was celebrated in a special ceremony, highlighting the fundamental significance of a shared charter of environment-related values across regions, cultures and creeds, and honouring the contributions of Her Royal Highness Princess Basma of Jordan.

IUCN announced that its *World Parks Congress* will take place in South Africa in 2003.

On the last day, the Government of Guatemala delivered an invitation to hold the Third World Conservation Congress in that country.

Several *youth-for-environment* initiatives were launched, in collaboration with the Reuters Foundation, to engage future generations in the safeguard of the planet. These included the Global Youth Reporters Programme (teenage reporters from around the world covered the events at the Congress); and, under the aegis of IUCN, the "Street Kids Journal" (young Jordanians aged 11-13 writing a newspaper and distributing over 10,000 issues daily throughout Amman).

Reuters Foundation and IUCN honored the global winner, Alanna Mitchell, together with eight regional winners of this year's *Reuters-IUCN Media Awards for Excellence in Environmental Reporting*, in the presence of Her Majesty Queen Noor.

The Second World Conservation Congress adopted resolutions providing resounding support to new and much more forceful action to halt the extinction process and ecosystem degradation. It pledges continuous support for the world's Multilateral Environmental Agreements (such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Ramsar Convention, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention to Combat Desertification, the World Heritage Convention, and the Convention on Migratory Species). It committed IUCN to active participation in the preparation of the "Rio+10" anniversary of the Earth Summit in 2002.

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