

## ELEVENTH MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE RAMSAR CONVENTION ON WETLANDS: 6-13 JULY 2012

The eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 11) of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands convened on Friday, 6 July, at the Palace of Parliament in Bucharest, Romania, and will continue until 13 July on the theme “Wetlands: Home and Destination” to highlight the tourism and recreation opportunities provided by wetlands. COP 11 delegates will assess implementation of the Ramsar Convention and discuss a variety of issues including: sustainable use of wetlands; knowledge and best practices on technical issues; and work by member states and the Secretariat for the next triennium. The COP was preceded by the 44th meeting of the Ramsar Standing Committee on 4 July, and regional meetings on 5-6 July.

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE RAMSAR CONVENTION

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (also known as the Ramsar Convention) was signed in Ramsar, Iran, on 2 February 1971, and came into force on 21 December 1975. The Convention provides a framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

**CONVENTION OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE:** Originally emphasizing the conservation and wise use of wetlands primarily to provide a habitat for waterbirds, the Convention has subsequently broadened its scope to address all aspects of wetland conservation and wise use, thereby recognizing the importance of wetlands as ecosystems that contribute to both biodiversity conservation and human well-being. Wetlands cover an estimated 9% of the Earth’s land surface, and contribute significantly to the global economy in terms of water supply, fisheries, agriculture, forestry and tourism.

The Convention currently has 162 parties. A total of 2040 wetland sites covering over 193.4 million hectares are included in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance. Parties to the Convention commit themselves to: designate at least one site that meets the Ramsar Criteria for inclusion in the Ramsar List and ensure maintenance of the ecological character of each Ramsar site; include wetland conservation within national land-use planning in order to promote the wise use of all wetlands within their territory; establish nature reserves on wetlands and promote training in wetland research and management; and consult with other parties about Convention implementation, especially with regard to transboundary wetlands, shared water systems, shared species and development projects affecting wetlands.

Contracting parties meet every three years to assess progress in implementing the Convention and wetland conservation, share

knowledge and experience on technical issues, and plan for the next triennium. In addition to the COP, the Convention’s work is supported by a Standing Committee (SC), a Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), and the Ramsar Bureau, which carries out the functions of a Secretariat.

**PREVIOUS MEETINGS OF THE COP:** There have been ten meetings of the COP since the Convention’s entry into force: COP 1 in Cagliari, Italy (November 1980); COP 2 in Groningen, the Netherlands (May 1984); COP 3 in Regina, Canada (May-June 1987); COP 4 in Montreux, Switzerland (June-July 1990); COP 5 in Kushiro, Japan (June 1993); COP 6 in Brisbane, Australia (March 1996); COP 7 in San José, Costa Rica (May 1999); COP 8 in Valencia, Spain (November 2002); COP 9 in Kampala, Uganda (November 2005); and COP 10 in Changwon, Republic of Korea (October-November 2008).

**COP 7:** At COP 7, delegates focused on the interrelations between human societies and wetland habitats. They considered the Convention’s implementation in each region and adopted 30 resolutions and four recommendations on policy, programme and budgetary issues. In addition, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Ramsar Bureau and the UNESCO World Heritage Center.

**COP 8:** COP 8 focused on the role of wetlands in water provision, as well as their cultural and livelihoods aspects. Delegates adopted more than 40 resolutions addressing policy, technical, programme and budgetary matters, including: wetlands and agriculture; climate change; cultural issues; mangroves; water allocation and management; and the Report of the World Commission on Dams. Delegates also approved the Convention’s budget and Work Plan for 2003-2005, and its Strategic Plan for 2003-2008.

**COP 9:** COP 9 adopted 25 resolutions on a wide range of policy, programme and budgetary matters, including: additional scientific and technical guidance for the implementation of the Ramsar Wise Use Concept; engagement of the Convention in ongoing multilateral processes dealing with water; the Convention’s role in natural disaster prevention, and climate change mitigation and adaptation; wetlands and poverty reduction; cultural values of wetlands; and the emergence of avian influenza. The COP also adopted the Convention’s budget and Work Plan for the 2006-2008 triennium, and reviewed its Strategic Plan 2003-2008. An informal Ministerial Dialogue adopted the Kampala Declaration, which emphasizes the role of the Convention in arresting continuing loss and degradation of wetland ecosystems.

**COP 10:** COP 10 adopted 32 resolutions, including on: wetlands and climate change; wetlands and biofuels; wetlands and extractive industries; wetlands and poverty eradication; wetlands and human health and well-being; enhancing biodiversity in rice paddies as wetland systems; and promoting international cooperation on the conservation of waterbird

flyways. The COP also adopted the Convention's budget for 2009-2013 and the Strategic Plan 2009-2015.

### INTERSESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

**STANDING COMMITTEE:** The SC met six times since COP 10 in 2008. The first meeting, SC 39, took place immediately following COP 10 to hold elections and to determine the date and venue of the following meeting. SC 40 (May 2009) discussed financial issues, regional initiatives 2009-2012, administrative reform and implementation of the Strategic Plan 2009-2015.

SC 41 (April-May 2010) in Kobuleti, Georgia, considered administrative reform, such as hosting of the Secretariat by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the roles and responsibilities of the SC, and preparations for COP 11. At SC 42 (May 2011), Kim Chan Woo, Republic of Korea, was replaced by Yeon-Chul Yoo as SC Chair. SC 43 (October-November 2011) discussed draft resolutions for possible adoption at COP 11. SC 44 (July 2012) convened just prior to the opening of COP 11 to finalize preparations.

**SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL REVIEW PANEL:** The STRP met twice since COP 10 (30 March - 3 April 2009 and 14-18 February 2011, in Gland, Switzerland). The STRP established 10 thematic work areas (TWAs) on: regional networking; strategic, emerging and ongoing issues; wetland inventory, assessment, monitoring and reporting; wetlands and human health; wetlands and climate change; wetlands and water resources management; wetlands of international importance; wetland management - restoration, mitigation and compensation; wetlands and agriculture; and communications, education, participation and awareness (CEPA). A mid-term workshop was held from 22-26 February 2010, in Gland, Switzerland, to continue work on the TWAs.

**REGIONAL MEETINGS:** Since COP 10, five regional meetings were held to facilitate preparations for COP 11. The meetings were held in: Trnava, Slovak Republic; Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; Jakarta, Indonesia; Kingston, Jamaica; and Koror, Palau. They focused on understanding the state of Ramsar implementation, prioritizing areas for action, preparing for COP 11 and elaborating recommendations for action.

**FIFTH AND SIXTH WORLD WATER FORUMS:** The fifth World Water Forum, held in March 2009, in Istanbul, Turkey, and the sixth World Water Forum, held in March 2012, in Marseille, France, addressed a number of wetlands issues, including: transboundary basin management; wetlands restoration to mitigate impacts of water-related disasters; integrated flood management; and payment for environmental services.

**NINTH INTECOL INTERNATIONAL WETLANDS CONFERENCE:** The ninth International Wetlands Conference of the International Association for Ecology (INTECOL) convened from 3-8 June 2012, in Orlando, US. The INTECOL addressed a broad range of topics including: biodiversity; biogeochemistry; climate change; communication, education and outreach; constructed wetlands; conservation and management; ecosystem restoration; ecosystem services; and wetlands in a global context.

**UN CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (UNCSD OR Rio+20):** Rio+20 convened from 20-22 June 2012, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to mark the 20th anniversary of the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), which convened in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The outcome document of the meeting, "The Future We Want," addresses a number of issue areas relevant to wetlands, including: food security and nutrition and sustainable agriculture; water and sanitation; sustainable tourism; disaster risk reduction; climate change; forests; biodiversity; and desertification, land degradation and drought.

### OPENING CEREMONY

Magor Csibi, Director, WWF Romania, opened the ceremony. Ramsar Standing Committee Chair Yeon-Chul Yoo, Republic of Korea, handed over the Ramsar flag on behalf of the COP 10

Presidency to Corneliu Mugurel Cozmanciuc, State Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Romania, who welcomed delegates to Romania.

Ovidiu Silaghi, Minister of Transport and Infrastructure, Romania, stressed the need to balance economic and infrastructure growth with development paths that permit nature to flourish, urging parties to work together to secure wetlands to preserve biodiversity, diminish the effects of climate change and secure livelihoods for local communities.

Bogdan Aurescu, State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Romania, said that hosting Ramsar COP 11 in Bucharest was an important part of Romania's environmental diplomacy, and urged delegates to make decisions reflecting the need to reconcile development with environmental concerns.

Remus Cernea, Prime Minister's Counselor, Romania, said the Ramsar Convention and Rio+20 share the same goal of preserving the environment, and underscored the importance of COP 11 and future political decisions for wetland protection.

Ramsar Convention Secretary General Anada Tiéga noted the Ramsar Convention addresses several key issues discussed at Rio+20, including: sustainable tourism; climate change; sustainable agriculture; water and sanitation; and biodiversity. Emphasizing the financial vulnerability of the Ramsar Convention, he called on COP 11 to approve the proposed programme of work and budget. Recalling that COP 11 is the last COP during his term as Secretary General, he thanked the wide range of stakeholders who have contributed to the Convention's achievements.

Julia Marton-Lefèvre, Director General, IUCN, reiterated the long-lasting partnership between the Ramsar Convention and IUCN, underlining IUCN's strong commitment to continue hosting the Ramsar Secretariat. She highlighted the upcoming IUCN World Conservation Congress, on the theme "Nature+," taking place 6-15 September 2012, in Jeju, Republic of Korea.

Emmanuel Faber, Co-Chief Operating Officer, Groupe Danone, described responsible wetlands management as an essential part of business and acknowledged the partnership between Ramsar and Danone. He reviewed the activities made possible by this partnership, including the "wetland carbon" component of the Livelihood Fund, a nascent carbon investment fund that offers investors access to biodiversity-friendly carbon credits.

Masa Nagai, Acting Deputy Director, Division of Environmental Law and Conventions, UNEP, addressed delegates on behalf of UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner. He highlighted the recognition of sustainable tourism in the Rio+20 outcome document and reaffirmed commitment to supporting Ramsar Convention implementation, whatever decision is made regarding institutional hosting of the Ramsar Secretariat.

James Leape, Director General, WWF International, identified key outcomes for decisions at COP 11: resolving the dispute on the Secretariat's hosting arrangement; revitalizing the Ramsar Small Grants Fund; and adopting the integrated framework for avoiding, mitigating and compensating for wetland losses.

Tiéga, Marton-Lefèvre and Franck Riboud, CEO, Groupe Danone, highlighted successes of the Danone Fund for Nature and the Livelihood Fund. Tiéga presented the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards, which recognize individuals and organizations promoting the conservation and wise use of wetlands. The awards, accompanied by a cash prize, were given in three categories: Education, to the Wisconsin Wetlands Association, for leadership in promoting education and awareness of wetlands and the Ramsar Convention; Management, to Augusta Henriques, for her central role in protecting mangroves and wetlands in Guinea-Bissau; and Science, to Tatsuichi Tsujii, for his contribution to wetland science in Japan and internationally. Tiéga also presented a Recognition of Achievement Award to Thymio Papayannis for his leadership in the field of wetland conservation, and a 40th Anniversary Honorary Ramsar Award to Luc Hoffmann, a founding father of the Ramsar Convention.