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## IUCN World Conservation Congress Highlights: Sunday, 12 October 2025

Interconnection was the recurring mantra on the fourth day of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Conservation Congress 2025. Discussions highlighted how nature conservation cannot succeed in isolation but requires whole-of-society and whole-of-economy approaches that reach across different communities and siloes. “We cannot afford to win the race to net zero by losing nature,” warned one speaker in relation to the biodiversity impacts of renewable energy deployment. The day also saw the Congress’s Forum conclude with a recap of major reports and announcements launched over the four days.

### High-level Dialogues

The **Transformational Change from Rio and Beyond: An All-out Push for the 2030 Goals** Dialogue centered on two of the Congress’s themes: scaling up resilient conservation action; and transitioning to nature-positive economies and societies. The Dialogue was moderated by Julia Marton-Lefèvre, Chair, Board Villars Institute Foundation. In her keynote address, Grethel Aguilar, Director General, IUCN, underscored the need to continue striving for wholeness, breaking siloes, challenging inertia, and embracing innovation.

The first panel focused on, among others, enhancing synergies between the Rio Conventions and multiple stakeholders. Batbataar Bat, Minister of Climate Change and Environment, Mongolia, affirmed the work his government is doing to combat desertification, climate change, and biodiversity loss, and enhance ecosystem resilience.

Ruth Spencer, Chair, Marine Ecosystems Protected Areas Trust Fund, Antigua and Barbuda, reflected on the work local communities are doing to implement the Escazú Agreement, noting that locals are stepping up to hold governments accountable.

Astrid Schomaker, Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), emphasized that countries need to work to enhance synergies through shared finance mechanisms and multifocal projects.

During the second panel on visions for a framework beyond the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, CEO and Chairperson, Global Environmental Facility (GEF), stressed the need for national governments to create policies and frameworks to level the economic playing field, including through tax reforms and green accounting.

Jacob Martin-Malus, Assistant Deputy Minister, Biodiversity, Wildlife and Parks, Government of Québec, discussed his province’s collaboration with the local Inuit population to support fragile Arctic ecosystems.

Norah Kimathi, Co-founder, Zerobionic, shared her company’s work to enhance accessibility through robotics, highlighting youth involvement in policy co-creation and change in leadership.

Closing the session, Andrea Meza, Deputy Executive Secretary, UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), emphasized the role of social movements in igniting national change.

**The Balancing Act: Feeding People, Sustaining the Planet:** This High-level Dialogue explored ways to reconcile



Ruth Spencer, Chair, Marine Ecosystems Protected Areas Trust Fund, Antigua and Barbuda



Andrea Meza, Deputy Executive Secretary, UNCCD



**Agnes Kalibata**, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for the 2021 Food Systems Summit

agricultural production with healthy ecosystems and people. José Luis Chicoma, Former Minister of Production, Peru, moderated.

In a keynote address, Agnes Kalibata, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for the 2021 Food Systems Summit, stressed that restoring ecosystems will be impossible without changing how we grow and produce food. She lauded the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems, and Climate Action, noting that we cannot achieve the objectives of the Paris Agreement and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) without transforming food systems.

The panel discussion focused on ways to support the transformation of food and agricultural systems. Nizar Hani, Minister of Agriculture, Lebanon, highlighted the importance of agroecology and agroforestry initiatives, as well as the need to support capacity building amongst farmers.

Elizabeth Nsimadala, President, Eastern Africa Farmers Federation, noted the challenge of balancing the competing demands for food production with planetary health. She underscored the need to recognize small-holder farms as equal partners in the co-creation and co-implementation of transformative solutions.

Sandrine Enguehard, Société Générale, discussed the need to address deforestation and called for blended finance to derisk



**Sandrine Enguehard**, Deputy Corporate Sustainability Officer, Société Générale

investment. She also highlighted the importance of working with commercial partners to improve the sustainability of supply chains.

Ewald Rametsteiner, Forestry Division, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), highlighted the progress made since the 2021 Food Systems Summit, pointing to the 130 countries that now have established pathways for food system transformation, including the incorporation of agrifood systems into nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and biodiversity targets.

Gloria Amor Paredes, Co-founder, Salumayag Youth Collective for Forests, discussed her organization's work to preserve heirloom seed varieties and support Indigenous farming techniques. She emphasized the importance of creating meaningful spaces for youth to shape change, incorporating Indigenous knowledges into policies and programmes, and securing land and resource rights for Indigenous Peoples and youth.

### **Thematic Sessions**

**Nature-Positive Renewables: Aligning Climate and Energy Goals:** This thematic session touched upon the themes of reducing climate overshoot risks and transitioning to nature-positive economies and societies. Marco Lambertini, Nature Positive Initiative, celebrated the recent news that global renewable energy generation has surpassed fossil fuels but warned that the widespread deployment of renewable infrastructures risks having negative collateral effects on biodiversity. He contrasted the “net positive” approach in nature conservation with the “net zero” approach in climate policy and called for integrating nature-positive principles into renewables deployment.

The ensuing panel discussion was moderated by Vhalinavho Khavhagali, IUCN. Jiang Hao, China Renewable Energy Engineering Institute, hailed China's rapid deployment of renewables and shared a local case where a hydropower plant construction was halted to study the project's impacts on a rare species.

Karen Westley, Vice-President of Sustainability, Shell, and Vice-President of Ipieca, offered her opinion on the need to consider the “entire spectrum of energy provision” from oil and gas to renewables and discussed Shell's collaboration with



**Jiang Hao**, China Renewable Energy Engineering Institute

Indigenous Peoples in Canada to reforest degraded agricultural land, among other initiatives.

Gauri Singh, International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), recalled that IRENA has spent the last decade building the narrative that renewables are the future and is now shifting to the “how” of deploying renewables in a nature-positive manner. She cautioned against “top-down” approaches and urged the involvement of local communities.

Adonai Herrera-Martínez, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, said that, in contrast to the climate, biodiversity indicators are diverse and local and called for clearer guidance for financial actors to align their investments with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

Prompts from the audience sparked discussion on: phasing out oil and gas; the role of the investment community in nature-positive renewables; and the importance of improving communication between ministries and sectors.

**Rethinking Urban Conservation: Framing New Opportunities for Urban Protected Areas:** This thematic session touched on two Congress themes: disruptive innovation and leadership for conservation; and transitioning to nature-positive economies and societies.

Madhu Rao, Chair, IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas, drew attention to the fact that cities are home to 55% of the world’s population, with this number set to rise to 75% by 2050, but lamented the challenges faced by urban protected areas (UPAs).

In a video message, Carolina Figuero and Hoda Gray, Co-Chairs of IUCN’s Urban Conservation Strategies Specialist Group, noted that UPAs are fragmented and underfunded despite often being the first point of contact between people and nature.

Peter Frost, Natural Resources, Wales, moderated the panel discussion, noting that the dialogue will feed into the 11-year update of the IUCN UPA Guidelines. Supporting a specific IUCN category for UPAs, Ingrid Coetzee, Biodiversity, Nature and Health, ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability, highlighted that these areas can contribute to various global wetlands and migratory species targets.

Pedro Menezes, Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change, Brazil, argued that a specific IUCN category for UPAs is unnecessary, preferring to consider systems of protected areas in a holistic manner.

Marco Vinicio Cerezo, General Director, Fundación para el Ecodesarrollo y la Conservación (FUNDAECO), Guatemala, supported a systems approach to UPAs, sharing the story of Guatemala City’s expansion and transformation into a green city, noting that over 5000 hectares of the city are green spaces.

Alison Barnes, Chief Executive, New Forest National Park Authority, UK, recalled the community and partner engagement throughout the process towards the 2019 designation of London as a National Park City, and highlighted the creation of a [Universal Charter for National Park Cities](#).

**A Global Strategy for Conserving Freshwater Biodiversity:** This thematic session aligned with the Congress’s themes of scaling up resilient conservation action and transitioning to nature-positive economies and societies.

The session, moderated by Maria Ana Borges, IUCN, elaborated the rationale and process for developing the first

global, Union-wide [Freshwater Biodiversity Conservation Strategy](#).

Catherine Sayer, IUCN, highlighted the importance of freshwater ecosystems as biodiversity hotspots and ecosystem service providers. While acknowledging that freshwater species populations have declined by 85% since 1970, with a quarter threatened with extinction, she welcomed increasing recognition of this issue through GBF Targets 2 (restore 30% of all degraded ecosystems) and 3 (conserve 30% of land, waters and seas), among others.

In a keynote, James Dalton, Water and Wetlands, IUCN, presented the process of developing the Freshwater Biodiversity Conservation Strategy, its 2030 vision, and its key pillars: pollution; invasive species; habitats; and connectivity.

In the ensuing discussion, the panel reflected on: the integration of climate change, governance and policy as cross-cutting aspects in the strategy; the role of working landscapes such as floodplains; and challenges related to collaboration between governments and Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) in freshwater ecosystems.

Isabel Wallnoefer, IUCN, moderated the expert panel comprised of: Ian Harrison, Freshwater Conservation Committee Co-Chair, IUCN Species Survival Commission; Tatiana Lobato de Magalhaes, Autonomous University of Querétaro; and John Simaika, International Water Management Institute. Underscoring the complexity and multidimensional nature of freshwater ecosystems, they stressed, among others, the need to: monitor relevant motions and resolutions before the Members’ Assembly; harmonize various conventions’ priorities related to hydrological cycle; realign fragmented policy instruments; and standardize monitoring frameworks.

### **Changemakers Pitch**

**A Journey with the Changemakers: Lessons and Growth:** In this pitch event, former IUCN changemakers gathered to reflect on their projects. Justin Langan, Executive Director, O’KANATA, moderated the event.

Brigitta Gunawan, Founder, Diverseas, explained that her programme connects storytelling and science by producing immersive films and bringing virtual reality to classrooms to co-design ocean literacy curricula with local educators.



Saed Hanani, Founder and CEO, Foras Khadra



Inna Modja, UNCCD Goodwill Ambassador

Yara Yousry, Co-founder, Texula, showcased her social enterprise, which processes banana tree waste into sustainable fibers that can replace synthetic fibers in the textile and packaging industries.

Camille Rivera, Founder, Oceanus Foundation, explained that their Blue Carbon Programme, initially limited to restoring abandoned mangroves, now includes building mangrove-positive businesses to enhance the livelihoods of local communities.

Saed Hanani, Founder and CEO, Foras Khadra, recalled that, as a changemaker, his initiative involved processing orange peels into eco-friendly fibers. Despite challenges in accessing materials and funding in Palestine, he highlighted that he continued his journey through several other initiatives, including Kalimat, an Arabic platform for climate science content.

Reflecting on their journeys, the changemakers discussed existing challenges and gaps, such as lack of proper mentorship and bias against female and youth social entrepreneurs.

After the panel discussion, a current changemaker, Becca Liu, Founder of HappyPower, introduced her project, which uses modular playgrounds as a source of clean energy that can currently generate and store electricity for up to 500 low-income households.

### Exhibitor Event

**The Global Biodiversity Framework Fund: Early Successes and Perspectives:** This exhibitor event contributed to the Congress's themes of scaling up resilient conservation action and transitioning to nature-positive economies and societies. Moderated by David Ainsworth, GEF, speakers reflected on the early achievements of the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF), launched in 2023 to enhance the implementation of the GBF, the fund having mobilized USD 200-300 million.

Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, GEF CEO and Chairperson, listed the improvements of GEF funding modalities through the GBFF including: reduced project approval time down to 6 months; flexible capitalization, which enables new funding from the private sector and philanthropy; and increased inclusivity and equity by providing direct funding for IPLCs.

Participants from MEXICO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO, and MADAGASCAR thereafter shared their experiences in GBFF-funded projects, highlighting, among others, a whole-of-society approach, the role of IPLCs in project implementation, and the importance of integrating biodiversity actions in land use mapping.

Astrid Schomaker, CBD Executive Secretary, reported anomalies and inaccuracies in current estimations of the biodiversity funding gap. She noted that while there is a growing tendency of donors towards bilateral funding, there is a need to further de-risk support to least developed countries.

Jacob Martin-Malus, Government of Québec, highlighted the importance of sub-national donors and shared his government's actions in developing the 2030 Nature Plan.

### Forum Closing

Under the title **Powering Transformative Conservation**, the closing session was moderated by Musonda Mumba, Secretary General, Convention on Wetlands.

IUCN Director General Aguilar reflected on the past four days of the Congress, emphasizing that "one truth has become undeniably clear: conservation works." She highlighted some of the key announcements made during the Congress, including the recovery of green sea turtle populations, the rollout of the [IUCN World Heritage Outlook 3](#), as well as the launch of: the Rapid High Integrity Nature Positive Outcomes approach, the [second Nature-based Solutions Global Standard](#), and the [IUCN Glacier Action Network](#). She announced that Panama will host the 2027 World Protected and Conserved Areas Congress and concluded by underscoring three priorities: scaling up science-based action; ensuring equity and inclusivity; and aligning nature and the economy.

Following a music performance by Inna Modja, UNCCD Goodwill Ambassador, a panel convened to discuss key take-aways from the Congress. Justin Langan, Executive Director, O'KANATA, welcomed the meaningful dialogues and promotion of the role and knowledges of Indigenous Peoples. Amelia Fawcett, Co-Chair, International Advisory Panel on Biodiversity Credits, congratulated the Congress for its focus on action, helping to "move the needle from what to how." Referring to "radical tenderness," Swetha Stotra Bhashyam, Global Youth Biodiversity Network, called for changing the narrative around our relationship with nature.

In her closing remarks, IUCN President Razan Al Mubarak highlighted that protecting nature is not just an environmental goal but the foundation of human well-being and prosperity. She urged members to shift the focus from dialogue to decision in the upcoming Members' Assembly.

The Forum came to a close at 5:09pm.



Musonda Mumba, Secretary General, Convention on Wetlands