



## NINTH MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON WETLANDS: 8-15 NOVEMBER 2005

The Ninth Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP9) to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands opened on Tuesday, 8 November 2005, and will continue until 15 November 2005 at the Speke Resort Munyonyo in Kampala, Uganda. The theme of the Conference is "Wetlands and water: supporting life, sustaining livelihoods."

Delegates to COP9 will consider over 20 agenda items, including the Convention's Work Plan for 2006-2008 and the review of its Strategic Plan for 2003-2008, as well as reports and recommendations submitted by Parties and by the Convention's Standing Committee. COP9 will also consider implementation of the Convention at the global level and reports on a variety of issues, including the proposed budget for 2006-2008 and the work of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP).

A Ministerial Dialogue, a special statement on the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and its results relating to the Ramsar Convention, and a technical session on applying the wise use principle in integrated water management are scheduled to take place during the Conference.

COP9, the first Ramsar COP to be held in Africa, is expected to adopt the Kampala Declaration and over 20 resolutions submitted by the Standing Committee and Parties on a wide range of policy, programme and budgetary matters.

### 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. This shift in focus reflects the increasing recognition of the importance of wetlands as ecosystems that contribute to both biodiversity conservation and human wellbeing. Wetlands cover an estimated nine percent of the Earth's land surface, and contribute significantly to the global economy in terms of water supply, fisheries, agriculture, forestry, and tourism.

The Ramsar Convention is the only environmental treaty dealing with a particular ecosystem, and currently has 147 Parties. A total of 1524 wetland sites covering 129.1 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 the next triennium. In addition to the COP, the Convention's work is supported by a Standing Committee, an STRP, and the Ramsar Bureau, which carries out the functions of a Secretariat.

**PREVIOUS MEETINGS OF THE COP:** There have been eight meetings of the COP since the Convention's entry into force: COP1 in Cagliari, Italy (24-29 November 1980); COP2 in Gröningen, the Netherlands (7-12 May 1984); COP3 in Regina, Canada (27 May-5 June 1987); COP4 in Montreux, Switzerland (27 June-4 July 1990); COP5 in Kushiro, Japan (9-16 June 1993); COP6 in Brisbane, Australia (19-27 March 1996); COP7 in San José, Costa Rica (10-18 May 1999); and COP8 in Valencia, Spain (18-26 November 2002).

**COP7:** At COP7, 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.

**COP8:** With over 1000 participants, COP8 was the largest COP in the Convention's history. Focusing 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. They also approved the Convention's budget and Work Plan for 2003-2005, and its Strategic Plan for 2003-2008.

### INTERSESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

**STANDING COMMITTEE:** The Standing Committee has convened four times since COP8, beginning with its 29th meeting (SC29), which took place from 26-28 February 2003. At SC29,



the Committee selected Peter Bridgewater (Australia) to become Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention. SC29 also selected regional experts to serve on the STRP in 2003-2005, and appointed Max Finlayson (Australia) and Heather MacKay (South Africa) as STRP's Chair and Vice-chair respectively.

SC30, held from 13-16 January 2004, reviewed preparations for COP9 and the STRP's mid-term progress, and addressed budgetary issues and small grants fund allocation.

SC31, which met from 6-10 June 2005, addressed numerous matters on the agenda for COP9 and agreed on a budget to be submitted to COP9, which includes seed money to support several regional initiatives. Finalists for the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards were also announced.

The Standing Committee also met immediately prior to COP9, on Monday, 7 November. Participants discussed various procedural and organizational issues for COP9 and several draft resolutions, including the proposed emergency resolution on avian flu, draft resolution on the Antarctic and draft resolution on recognizing Wetlands of International Importance for their traditional cultural values.

**SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL REVIEW PANEL:** The STRP has met twice since COP8, establishing six expert working groups to assist it in its work prior to COP9. These working groups addressed: wetland inventory and assessment, the wise use concept, water resource management, Ramsar site designation and management, and effectiveness of implementation of the Convention.

The STRP also provided advice on other scientific and technical topics, including proposed new definitions of "wise use" and "ecological character," and an additional criterion for identifying Wetlands of International Importance, namely the "aquatic megafauna."

**REGIONAL MEETINGS:** Since COP8, five regional meetings have been held at the request of the Standing Committee with a view to assisting Parties with the Convention's implementation and preparations for COP9. The meetings (held in Merida, Mexico; Yerevan, Armenia; Arusha, Tanzania; Beijing, China and Nadi, Fiji) generated various recommendations and conclusions, including several draft resolutions for consideration at the COP. Regional consultations also took place immediately prior to COP9 to discuss regional positions.

**THIRD WORLD WATER FORUM AND MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE:** Wetland issues were addressed at the Third World Water Forum, which met from 16-23 March 2003, in Kyoto, Osaka and Shiga, Japan. The two-day Ministerial Conference held during the Forum addressed five themes: safe drinking water and sanitation; water for food and development; water pollution prevention and ecosystem conservation; disaster mitigation and risk management; and water resources management and benefit sharing. The Ministerial Declaration noted the role of wetlands in ensuring sustainable water supply.

**SEVENTH MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY:** CBD COP7, which met in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from 9-20 February 2004, addressed issues relevant to the Ramsar Convention through its agenda items on protected areas, inland water ecosystems and marine and coastal biodiversity. In particular, COP7 adopted a revised work programme on inland water biodiversity and called for greater synergies between the CBD and the Ramsar Convention.

**GLOBAL FLYWAYS CONFERENCE 2004:** The Global Flyways Conference to review the status of waterbirds around the world was held from 3-8 April 2004, in Edinburgh, UK. The conference highlighted the perilous state of many of the world's waterbirds, and set an agenda for national and international action on wetlands and waterbirds, including through implementation of the Ramsar Convention.

**OTHER RELEVANT MEETINGS:** Other wetlands-related meetings held earlier this year include the Water for Food and Ecosystems Conference held in the Hague, the Netherlands from 31 January to 4 February; the Asian Wetlands Symposium held from 6-9 February in Bhubaneswar and Chilika, India; the Fourth Meeting of the Liaison Group of the Biodiversity-related Conventions held on 4 October in Bonn, Germany; and the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds Agreement meeting held from 23-27 October in Dakar, Senegal.

#### **OPENING OF COP9**

Antonio Fernandez de Tejada, Spain, COP8's host country, handed over the Ramsar flag to Kahinda Otafiire, Minister of Lands, Water and the Environment, Uganda. Commending the Government of Uganda for hosting the first Ramsar COP in Africa, Fernandez de Tejada drew delegates' attention to new challenges facing the Convention and called for boosting international cooperation for the conservation of wetland ecosystems. Otafiire outlined Uganda's progress towards conservation and sustainable use of wetlands, and assured delegates that the theme of COP9 and the aims of the Convention will be upheld during the Conference.

Highlighting the findings of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, Peter Bridgewater, Secretary General, Ramsar Convention, noted that the rate of wetland degradation surpasses that of other ecosystems, and outlined two major tasks for the Conference: identifying problems and promoting the Convention. He stressed the need to balance the desire to add more sites to the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance with ensuring their effective management and representativeness. He called for: synergies among biodiversity-related Conventions; better environmental governance frameworks; and capacity building.

Bakary Kante, Director, Division of Environmental Conventions, UNEP, delivered an address on behalf of UNEP Executive Director Klaus Töpfer. He highlighted: enhanced cooperation between UNEP and the Ramsar Convention; wetlands' contribution to poverty reduction, disaster prevention and mitigation; and opportunities created by market approaches to ecosystem services.

Speaking on behalf of Ramsar's International Organization Partners, Achim Steiner, Director General of the World Conservation Union (IUCN), congratulated Uganda on its achievements in wetland conservation, expressed disappointment at the environmental outcomes of the recent UN World Summit, and called for greater coherence among multilateral environmental agreements and broader stakeholder engagement.

A civil society representative reported on the Civil Society Forum held on 4 November 2005. She stressed the importance of wetlands for poverty reduction and their ability to provide support services for sustaining livelihoods. She also proposed the development of legally binding mechanisms to hold Parties responsible for arrears in annual dues payments, and called on Parties to make information accessible to civil society organizations and local communities.

Speaking on behalf of donor countries, Kathelyne Craenen (Belgium), noted that wetlands conservation continues to be a lower priority on the donor agenda. She requested that wetlands be put on national and international investment agendas and called on Parties to advocate for the wise use of wetlands and their resources.

Youth representatives presented their concerns and proposals, asking delegates to ensure that information is easy to understand and to remember that youth will be impacted by COP9 decisions.

Philippe Jacob, Secretary General, Danone Group, presented the triennial Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards in the categories of science, management, and education, respectively to: Shuming Cai, Chinese Academy of Sciences, China; SH. A. Nezami Baloochi, Department of Environment, Province of Gilan, Iran; and a shared award between Reiko Nakamura, Ramsar Centre, Japan and the Wetlands Centre, Australia.