

## TENTH MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE RAMSAR CONVENTION ON WETLANDS: 28 OCTOBER – 4 NOVEMBER 2008

The tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands opened on Tuesday, 28 October, at the Changwon Exhibition Convention Center in Changwon, Republic of Korea, and will continue until 4 November. The theme of the conference is: "Healthy Wetlands, Healthy People." The meeting will consider more than 30 agenda items, including the Convention's Strategic Plan 2009-2014 and its budget for the triennium 2009-2011, as well as reports and recommendations submitted by parties and by the Convention's Standing Committee.

The meeting will also address issues relating to the Convention's implementation, including: communication, education, participation and awareness; future implementation of scientific and technical aspects of the Convention; partnerships and synergies with multilateral environmental agreements and other institutions; and principles for partnerships with the business sector. Regarding monitoring and assessment, agenda items include: a framework for data and information needs; a framework for detecting, reporting and responding to change in wetland ecological character; and updated guidance on environmental impact assessments and strategic environmental assessments. The COP will also address the role of wetlands in sustainable development issues, such as human health and well being, climate change, biofuels, extractive industries, urbanization and poverty reduction.

### 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 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 Convention currently has 158 parties. A total of 1758 wetland sites covering 161.3 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, 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 nine 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); and COP 9 in Kampala, Uganda (November 2005).

**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:** COP9, the first Ramsar COP held in Africa, 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, 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.

### INTERSESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

**STANDING COMMITTEE:** The Standing Committee has convened five times since COP 9. The first meeting (SC 33) took place immediately after COP 9 to consider administrative issues for the transition between trienniums. SC 34 (April 2006) considered, among other issues, collaboration with international organization partners, the legal status of the Convention's Secretariat, and financial matters.

SC 35 (February 2007) addressed budgetary matters, the draft strategic plan, wetlands and poverty reduction, and the status of Ramsar sites. It also approved the fourth joint work plan between the Ramsar Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity and elected Anada Tiéga (Niger) as the new Secretary-General. SC 36 (February 2008) continued deliberations on the draft strategic plan, the Secretariat's legal status and staffing, and core budget proposals for COP 10 consideration. SC 37 (June 2008) considered and approved 31 draft resolutions to be considered by COP 10.

**SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL REVIEW PANEL:** The STRP has met twice since COP 9 (May-June 2006 and January-February 2008 in Gland, Switzerland). It established nine thematic working groups, which addressed, among other issues: inventory, assessment, monitoring and indicators; wise use and ecological character of wetlands; Ramsar site designation and management; water resources management; wetlands and agriculture and wetlands and human health. The STRP also considered emerging scientific and technical issues, including climate change, avian influenza, and wetlands and mining/extractive industries.

**REGIONAL MEETINGS:** Since COP 9, six regional meetings have been held to assist parties with the Convention's implementation and preparations for COP 10. The meetings (held in Merida, Venezuela; Yaoundé, Cameroon; Bangkok, Thailand; Havana, Cuba; Apia, Samoa; and Stockholm, Sweden) generated various recommendations and conclusions, including several draft resolutions for consideration by the COP. Regional consultations also took place immediately prior to COP 10.

**FOURTH WORLD WATER FORUM:** The Fourth World Water Forum (March 2006, Mexico City, Mexico) 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.

**SECOND INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON WETLAND POLLUTANT DYNAMICS AND CONTROL:** This conference (September 2007 Tartu, Estonia) considered issues related to wetland pollution, including: heavy metals and organic pollutants in wetlands; nitrogen, phosphorous and carbon cycling; wetland hydrology; assessment and evaluation of ecological effects; and site specific risk assessment.

**CBD COP 9:** Held from 19-30 May 2008 in Bonn, Germany, COP 9 of Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) addressed issues relevant to the Ramsar Convention in its resolutions on the ecosystem approach, biodiversity and climate change, and inland waters biodiversity. It also endorsed the fourth Joint CBD-Ramsar Work Plan.

**EIGHTH INTECOL INTERNATIONAL WETLANDS CONFERENCE:** The eighth International Wetlands Conference of the International Association for Ecology (INTECOL) convened from 20-25 July 2008 in Cuiabá, Brazil. It addressed a broad spectrum of wetlands issues and adopted the Cuiabá Declaration on the State of Wetlands and their Role in a World of Climate Change including a number of recommendations of special interest to Ramsar parties.

### OPENING OF COP 10

Maria Mutagamba, Minister of Environment of Uganda, host country of COP 9, handed over the Ramsar flag to incoming COP President Lee Maanee, Minister of Environment, Republic of Korea. Underlining wetlands' role as an indispensable resource for human well being, Lee encouraged discussions on their contribution to global issues such as climate change, energy and human health. Kim Tae-ho, Governor of Gyeongnam Province, Republic of Korea, described the Province's actions and policies for wetland conservation and urged parties to tackle wetland degradation.

Anada Tiega, Ramsar Executive Secretary, encouraged parties to build partnerships to exchange experiences on payments for ecosystem services and wetland's role in water management, food and energy security, and climate change. Lee Myung-bak, President of the Republic of Korea, introduced his country's Green Growth policy, outlining how wetlands can contribute to economic development. He resolved to make the Republic of Korea a model Ramsar party and to increase financial support for implementation in developing countries.

The Little Angels Choir and children from previous COP host countries called for more action and emphasized the protection of wetlands, which represent mankind's connection to the world. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, via a video message, recalled that the 2005 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment sounded an alarm that wetlands are degrading faster than any other ecosystem. Chung Jong-hwan, Minister of Land, Transport and Maritime Affairs, Republic of Korea, highlighted that wetland conservation is at the core of Korea's Green Growth policy.

Choo Mi-ae, National Assembly Chairperson, Environment and Labor Committee, Republic of Korea, stressed that the Convention could provide long-term strategies to sustainably shape the future. She said that the harmonization of environment and human well being should be at the core of the Green Growth policy.

Julia Martin-Lefèvre, IUCN Director-General, delivered a message from the recent IUCN World Conservation Congress, describing biodiversity loss as a silent crisis threatening the well being of societies and their economies. She said biodiversity should receive the same level of attention as climate change.

David Coates, on behalf of CBD Executive Secretary Ahmed Djoghlaif, supported an integrated approach on water, wetlands, biodiversity and climate change, and highlighted that CBD COP 9 had endorsed the CBD-Ramsar Joint Work Plan. UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner: hailed the role of NGOs and the private sector in the Convention's evolution; highlighted UNEP's plan for a new global green deal, which emphasizes environmental sustainability; and underlined the importance of wetland conservation in addressing climate change.

Paul Mafabi, Ramsar Standing Committee Chair, announced the winners of the 2008 Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards: for science, David Pritchard, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and BirdLife International; for management, Denis Landenbergue, WWF International; and for education, Sansanee Choowaew, Mahidol University, Thailand. The Recognition of Excellence Award was presented to Jan Květ, Czech Republic.

The opening ceremony concluded with a signing ceremony for the Danone-Evian Fund for Nature, which addresses water resource management, carbon sequestration capacity and ecosystems.