

IUCN-THE WORLD CONSERVATION UNION

STATEMENT TO  
UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE  
FOURTH CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES

11 NOVEMBER 1998  
BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

I am speaking on behalf of IUCN-The World Conservation Union as coordinator of the IUCN National Committee of Argentina. It is an honor to have with us in this session the presence of the Head of Delegation, Alicia Barcea, chief advisor to UNDP and IUCN councillor; our President, Minister of Environment of Ecuador Yolanda Kakabadse, and two additional honourable councillors, Juan Mayr, Minister of Environment of Colombia, and Akiko Domoto, Parliamentarian in the Japanese Diet.

Madam President, Ministers, Government delegates, the Convention Secretariat, ladies and gentlemen. It is my pleasure to address you today to report on the Global Biodiversity Forum. The Global Biodiversity Forum, or GBF, provides an independent and strategic arena for all stakeholders, including governments, NGOs, the private sector, local and indigenous communities to discuss and debate important ecological, economic, and social issues relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

Over this last weekend, a number of institutions, including UNEP, the World Resources Institute, African Centre for Technology Studies, Climate Action Network-Latin America, UNITAR, the Biodiversity Action Network, the Indigenous People's Biodiversity Network, and IUCN hosted the eleventh session of the Global Biodiversity Forum. This was the second session devoted to exploring the linkages between the UNFCCC and the Convention on Biological Diversity, the first one being held last year in Kyoto at the time of the negotiations of the Kyoto Protocol.

As is recognised in Article 2 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Parties are called upon to address the problem of climate change in a manner which ensures that ecosystems and societies are not threatened. Further, Article 4.1(d) of the Convention commits Parties to promoting the sustainable management, conservation, and enhancement of sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases. It is these same sinks and reservoirs, such as forests and oceans that serve as a harbour for much of the world's biodiversity.

In this session of the GBF, 150 participants from 40 countries addressed four critical issues of concern to the biodiversity community with respect to the climate change agenda: National Strategies, Sustainable Use, Finance, and Forests.

The participants took note of the growing number of multilateral environmental agreements – the UNFCCC, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention to Combat Desertification, the Ramsar Convention, and the World Heritage Convention to name just a few. It was observed that this proliferation of agreements

has lead to a more and more fragemented international environmental regime. The planning and implementing capacity of many countries has become stressed. It was recommended that the international environmental regime be viewed in more holistic manner, and that on the national level countries should endeavour to do more to co-ordinate and build synergy in their efforts to implement these agreements, including exploring measures, such as watershed conservation which simultaneously mitigate climate change and prevent the loss of biodiversity. It was also stressed that the increasing number of agreements has created the risk that efforts to implement one agreement may contradict the objectives of another, such as replacing native forested ecosystems with plantations in order to sequester carbon.

The workshop on Sustainable Use presented evidence that recent extreme events, such as the floods in Bangladesh and China and coral bleaching in the Indian Ocean and Caribbean, have lead to a loss of biodiversity, and may be a signal of climate change. It was pointed out that resource-poor communities and communities heavily dependent on natural resources face tough choices in adapting to a climate changed world. We need to enhance the role of local communities, especially in promoting the active participation of groups such as indigenous communities and women. The full participation of all stakeholders in the design of strategies and actions is the key to successfully adapting to climate change.

The role of finance and economic incentives in promoting the co-ordination of climate change and biodiversity issues was also discussed. It was recognised that the Global Environment Facility has an important and clearly defined role to play in financing the implementation of the UNFCCC and the Convention on Biological Diversity. It was also noted that the GEF may be in a unique position to further the debate on how to implement the two conventions in a mutually supportive manner. The private sector has indicated a willingness to participate in the implementation of the goals of the UNFCCC and the CBD, but clear rules of the game are needed to provide sufficient encouragement for broad private sector involvement.

In the discussion on forests, the participants recognised that the destruction and conversion of forests and other natural ecosystems world-wide is a significant contributor to the loss of biodiversity and also a part of the problem of climate change. Forest-based measures intended to mitigate climate change could provide significant biodiversity and socio-economic benefits. However, this outcome is not assured. Done incorrectly, the forest-based measures to address climate change through the UNFCCC and its Kyoto Protocol, could result in negative impacts on forests and other natural ecosystems, communities and the climate system. It is essential that the implementation of the mechanisms of the UNFCCC and its Kyoto Protocol produce benefits to biodiversity conservation.

Finally, the participants to the 11<sup>th</sup> session of the GBF stressed the need for further efforts to raise the profile of biodiversity concerns within the climate change agenda. In particular, participants recommended that protecting the ecological integrity of nature and sustaining the societies which are supported by it is vital to addressing the climate change issue.

IUCN - The World Conservation Union, is one of the world's oldest international conservation organisations. It was established in 1948, and last week we celebrated

our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in our birthplace, Fontainebleau, France. As a conservation organisation, IUCN is unique in that it is a union of other organisations. It brings together 74 governments, including many in this room, 105 government agencies and more than 700 non-governmental organisations, drawn from 138 countries. Altogether the members of IUCN make up a global network of 900 institutions and some 8,000 scientists and experts in six Commissions from 139 countries. Our mission is to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature, and ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable.

Our work has indicated that addressing the problem of climate change is directly related to this mission. Progress since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit has been good but slow. The global climate is still very much threatened and we continue to see a net loss in quality of life and environmental degradation in many parts of the world.

Pollution and unsustainable management practices already threaten the life support systems upon which humanity depends. Climate change is an important additional stress. In the face of climate change, the loss of species and ecosystems will likely accelerate. Many species will be made more vulnerable to extinction, and important ecosystems, such as wetlands and coral reefs, could be eliminated in some places. Communities that are currently struggling to improve their livelihoods will be made even more vulnerable by climate change. Measures to protect the species, ecosystems, and the goods and services they provide to society may be rendered ineffective by climate change.

Future generations will judge us on our timidity in the global struggles to combat climate change, to avoid biodiversity loss, and to halt desertification. Without a much stronger commitment to solving these global problems, we will bequeath to our children and grandchildren an irretrievably impoverished world. Such a fate can be avoided, but it requires a strong international commitment and concerned action.

Madam President, Honourable delegates, we look forward to working with Conference of the Parties in the coming years and appreciate the opportunity to make this statement. Thank you.