

United Nations General Assembly informal consultations on environment

International Environmental Governance

Delivered by Ambassador Bhagwat Singh

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New York

Thank you Mr. Co-Chair,

The World Conservation Union, IUCN, welcomes the resumed consultations on the institutional framework for the UN environmental activities. We would like to thank you both for your efforts to guide the deliberations on this important subject.

IUCN would like to stress the urgency of moving forward to enable the international environmental governance system to address the challenges before us. Mr. Co-Chair, the current environmental problems are unprecedented: biodiversity is being lost at 1000 times natural background levels, 60% of the world's ecosystems are degraded and the levels of CO2 continue to increase with serious impacts on our climate. This environmental degradation is affecting, and will increasingly affect, the wellbeing of our societies, but also our economic growth and development, as shown by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and the Stern report on climate change. Unprecedented problems require unprecedented solutions.

Mr. Co-Chair, your summary of the first round of consultations, issued on 27 June 2006, provides a very useful assessment of the weaknesses of the current international governance system and of the different proposals to address them. IUCN welcomed also the report of the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence issued on 9 November and its proposals to strengthen the environmental work of the UN. We hope that this Assembly will consider positively its recommendations. These two pieces, together with previous discussions, especially in the context of the Cartagena process, provide a solid basis on which to take the actions required.

We know the problems of the current system and recommendations are already available. What is now needed is to take action.

Before addressing the specific questions proposed for this consultation, IUCN would like to stress, as we mentioned last year, that the present discussions should contribute to making sustainable development part of the "overarching framework of

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United Nations activities”, as called for in resolution 57/253 of the General Assembly. In this context, the ultimate goal of international environmental governance should be to ensure that the environmental goods and services upon which human wellbeing and development depend are provided in a sustainable and equitable manner in all countries. The institutions and processes that the international community uses to achieve this goal therefore should effectively and efficiently promote environmental sustainability through their own operations and mainstream environmental sustainability throughout other institutions and processes. We suggest some actions in this regard in our responses to the questions proposed for this consultation.

Concerning the question on implementation at the country level, IUCN wishes to highlight the following elements:

IUCN strongly believes that significant capacity building, based on national priorities, is needed to strengthen country-level implementation. The Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-Building provides a comprehensive and agreed framework, including needs for scientific knowledge, normative/policy advice and operational support, as well as priority thematic areas. However, implementation has not yet been achieved at satisfactory levels. We thus recommend to take the Bali plan as the basis for coordinated support to national efforts and to move decisively with adequate resources towards its implementation.

Concerning the institutional setting, IUCN agrees with the recommendation of the panel to enhance the partnership between UNEP – with its analytical and normative capacity - and UNDP – with its operational capacity - to provide support and capacity building on environmental matters at the country level. Environmental expertise also needs to be integrated under the Resident Coordinator system. This would be critical to provide support for the inclusion of environmental sustainability in national poverty reduction and development strategies and in responses to natural disasters.

Concerning the enhancement of global governance, IUCN recommends:

To “strengthen UNEP as the “environmental policy pillar” of the UN system, as recommended by the panel, including with enhanced normative and analytical capacity (especially scientific and technical) and broad responsibility to review progress towards improving the global environment. UNEP would need a more focused and longer term plan of action and adequate and a predictable funding base. Measures to strengthen the environmental pillar of the UN could be incremental in order not to delay the need to address the current weaknesses of the system. Key functions that could be strengthened in the short term include UNEP’s role as a convener and catalyst of existing authoritative scientific knowledge on the environment, drawing from governmental and non-governmental sources; the provision of effective technical support on the field of environment to UN operations; and the development of environmental and social safeguard policies to be incorporated in all the UN’s work.

Concerning enhanced coordination among multilateral environmental agreements and agencies, we believe that more coordination should be possible around issue-based clusters, following the successful experience with chemicals, including co-location of secretariats and meetings, streamlined reporting and coordinated scientific assessments. A strengthened and refocused Environmental Management Group (EMG) linked to the UN Development Group could also contribute to greater coordination.

An effective environmental governance system also needs to mobilize financial resources for sustainable development. IUCN recommends in this respect:

To strengthen the GEF as a major financial mechanism for the environment with a review of its contributions and significant increase in resources as proposed by the panel; and

Mainstream environment in development cooperation.

On the issue of partnerships, IUCN believes that effective reforms of the system should facilitate the engagement of civil society in the environmental work of the UN. We thus welcome the inclusion of this point in your consultations, given the important role played by non-state actors in areas such as provision of knowledge (e.g. IUCN), capacity building and mobilization of political action. It is also important that the UN promotes opportunities to further engage the private sector in its efforts to achieve sustainable development.

Mr. Co-Chair, this is an important time for improving the environmental governance system now that this

issue is before this Assembly. Political will is needed to bridge the current differences and make the necessary reforms to address the unprecedented environmental problems resulting from human activities to ensure sustainability and prosperity in all parts of the world. IUCN stands ready to support your efforts.

Thank you Mr. Co-Chair.

Created in 1948, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) brings together 82 States, 111 Government agencies, 800 plus NGO's, and some 10,000 scientists and experts from 181 countries in a unique worldwide partnership.

IUCN's mission is to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable.

IUCN is the world's largest environmental knowledge network and has helped over 75 countries to prepare and implement national conservation and biodiversity strategies. IUCN is a multicultural, multilingual organization with 1,000 staff located in 62 countries.