

The Future in our Hands: Addressing the Leadership Challenge of Climate Change

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The World Conservation Union, IUCN, applauds the Secretary General for his leadership in convening this high level meeting of world leaders to provide political momentum at a critical stage of the negotiations on climate change.

IUCN would like to stress the urgency of moving forward to reach a new global agreement on climate change at the upcoming meeting of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Bali in December. New and greater commitments are needed for the period after 2012 to build trust among the international community, orient public and private investments towards long-term objectives, and above all to face an unprecedented environmental threat.

Just a few weeks ago, IUCN released its 2007 Red List of Threatened Species and the news was very clear: the world is facing a global biodiversity extinction crisis. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concurs, noting in their Assessment Reports that the global temperature increase of 0.6°C which occurred in the 20th century had an impact on more than 400 plants and animals. There is an urgent need to limit greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that will not contribute further to this biodiversity loss, which, through compromise of ecosystem services, will also threaten livelihoods. On the other hand, healthy ecosystems provide a means to assist communities to better respond to climate change impacts.

For this special session on climate change, IUCN, drawing on our expertise linking biodiversity with human well-being, would like to address the questions that were raised in the Secretary-General Background note prepared for this meeting.

1. The challenge of adaptation: from vulnerability to resilience

➤ Enhancing the capacity of natural ecosystems and livelihoods to adapt to climate change

IUCN strongly supports the need for better assessing and mapping the vulnerability of ecosystems, protected areas and species, and for bridging the gap between scientists and resource managers to promote ways to enhance their resilience. Significant efforts should be made to address the specific issues faced by the most vulnerable sites such as island and coastal areas. With that in mind, IUCN is already working to assess the vulnerability of climate-sensitive species and ecosystems as well as protected areas including World Heritage sites. We believe that sustainable natural resource management requires mainstreaming of climate change considerations in planning and implementation and we are bringing together scientists, NGOs and policy-makers to develop the necessary tools and capacity.

➤ Reducing the vulnerability of the poor to climate change

IUCN recognizes that the poor are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change – both sudden and extreme events as well as longer term increased climate variability. We have joined forces with our partners to develop tools to assess community vulnerability to climate change and to outline available options to cope with that vulnerability. IUCN builds capacities of local communities to deal with extreme weather events and increased climate variability, for instance implementing flood risk reduction strategies in the Mekong Basin, managing mangroves in South-East Asia, or combating desertification in the Sahel.

2. Innovating a climate-friendly world: the role of technology and its dissemination

➤ Promoting new energy futures

We are today in a situation in which human and industrial activity made possible by fossil fuels is now threatening some of the critical services that ecosystems provide. Bioenergy, if produced and used wisely, can help support ecosystems. However, bioenergy strategies that do not fully account for longer term biodiversity concerns, also have the potential to create more problems than they solve. IUCN acknowledges the role that bioenergy could play in addressing the current energy demand challenges: New technologies and products that produce bioenergy can provide substitutes for ecosystems goods and services. This might include energy crops and second generation biofuels, that do not require land that might otherwise be used to grow food.

Bioenergy can also contribute to ensuring the sustainable management of ecosystems to fulfill energy demands while helping to store carbon. The CDM (Clean Development Mechanism) under the Kyoto protocol can help to contribute to reforestation and sustainable bioenergy, and in the next phase, may also help to conserve existing forest. These forests provide important ecosystem services such as helping to regulate hydrological systems that enable the sustainability of electricity generation from dams.

However, IUCN is concerned that we recognize that bioenergy is only part of the solution. It involves the use of other energy sources in its production and, depending on the means of production, can also have significant detrimental impacts on the very environment it use was intended to conserve. For the future, we will need to mobilize the full range of energy options while also clarifying the risks involved in these various options.

IUCN therefore recognizes that governments need to implement enabling policies and create regulatory frameworks that both encourage ecosystem conservation while ensuring that energy requirements are addressed. The international community needs to help ensure equitable access to energy, with businesses contributing through the development of clean renewable technologies that meet global energy demands. Those renewable energy sources must also be socially and environmentally sustainable.

IUCN also promotes the use of social and environmental standards for Clean Development Mechanism projects. IUCN has been involved in ongoing projects to build capacities of Designated National Authorities in Kenya, Tanzania, Vietnam, Mexico and the Philippines. More expertise and capacity-building is needed in particular in Africa and for small CDM projects.

3. Financing the response to climate change: investing in tomorrow

➤ Encouraging multilateral institutions to consider climate change in their investment strategies

Bilateral donors and multilateral institutions such as the World Bank should ensure that their investments in infrastructure and development programmes fully integrate climate change considerations, from mitigation to adaptation. Screening of new investments strategies should be made taking into account the level of greenhouse gas emissions involved in each scenario and factoring the environmental and financial risks induced by climate change impacts.

➤ Financing funds for adaptation and crisis response

As the Secretary General notes, significant new investments need to be made in financing for adaptation, including multilateral institutions together with the World Bank and the Global Environment Facility and other sources of multilateral and bilateral financing.

Increased adaptation funds could also be raised through a more robust Clean Development Mechanism, as well as emerging private initiatives.

4. Reducing emissions and stabilizing the climate: safeguarding our common future

➤ Reducing greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and ecosystem degradation

A crucial task for the international community is to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and ecosystem degradation. Land use change represents upwards of 25% of greenhouse gas emissions. Better management of carbon rich wetlands and forests should be encouraged by the diffusion of knowledge on best practices and by economic incentives. Done properly this will also contribute to the livelihoods of rural poor and indigenous communities.

To address the immense challenges, we all need to mobilize our efforts across political and cultural boundaries. As a permanent Observer of the UN and by bringing together governments, civil society, NGOs, science and business communities, IUCN can contribute to facilitate dialogue and to develop active partnerships to find innovative solutions to climate change.

IUCN reaffirms its commitment to work with our members and partners to address climate change as a priority. The World Conservation Congress, to be held in October 2008 in Barcelona, will have climate change as a central theme, and we would like to extend an invitation to all of you to join us for those discussions, so that together we can demonstrate progress and harness our collective commitment in support of a post-Kyoto regime.

To conclude, this meeting represents an important opportunity for the leaders of the world to provide the political momentum for the negotiations of the United Nations Climate Change conference in Bali later this year. Nature and the people that depend on it deserve no less, and this opportunity should not be missed.

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.