

Candidate Presentation, IUCN 11 October 2008

Mr President, Fellow Members, Friends:

Thank you for this opportunity to share some thoughts with you on conservation and on the work of our Union.

To those of us who care about the future of humanity, of civilisation as we know it, and indeed of life on this planet, the world we live in seems to be heading in the wrong direction.

The financial meltdown that has just burst onto the global economy now suddenly dominates the headlines. Not very long ago, it was terrorism that had captured them. And before that it was a war here and a war there or perhaps a hurricane or two.

The mess created by the breakdown of our global financial or political arrangements will no doubt soon be cleaned up. And one cannot doubt that the rich will have been left somewhat richer and the poor substantially poorer as a result. Nor that nature will have paid for many of the debts incurred. But history shows that no matter how cataclysmic the financial collapses may have looked at the time they happened, our social systems are resilient enough to recover from them quite quickly.

This is, unfortunately not true of natural systems. We all know from our work in the field how superbly resilient nature is under normal circumstances. But when they are pushed beyond certain limits natural systems can quite abruptly lose their capacity to revive themselves. Many of them, such as climate change, extinction of species and depletion of fossil fuels have very long term, and highly unpleasant consequences. Some of the most important ones are irreversible and permanent.

The immediate, the dramatic and the violent seem so easily to elbow out of our consciousness the slow, the invisible and the intangible – no matter how much larger, longer term or more profound their impacts on human welfare or planetary survival might be.

So it is with Climate Change which also quite suddenly intruded into the public's awareness not more than a few years ago. Unlike the other issues that regularly cycle through our lives, Climate Change is not something that will go away quickly. In fact it is here, bag and baggage, and will stay with our children for many generations to come. And it could be life-threatening – even at the planetary level. Yet, it does not seem able to command the kind of attention from our decision makers, our media or our publics the way a bank going bankrupt does.

So it was with Poverty. After 60 years of so-called international development, and some 1 trillion dollars of so-called development assistance, the number of poor in the world has not only not declined but actually risen by a factor of three.

And so it is with Biodiversity, which 16 years after the global treaty was signed in Rio de Janeiro is still a largely invisible subject except for the cognoscenti, the bulk of whom are probably present here in this hall today. At the same time, we have the greatest concentrations of wealth ever accumulated by a select few in all of history.

It does not take great scientific expertise to know that both the diseases of affluenza and povertitis, each afflicting opposite extremities of our societies, are highly destructive of the environment and particularly of biodiversity.

The irony, of course, is that the underlying causes for all these problems and diseases are always pretty much the same – unsustainable lifestyles, unsustainable consumption patterns, unsustainable production systems and unsustainable extremes in income and wealth.

As we all know, WWF's Living Planet Index states that the global ecological footprint stands today at somewhere around 1.4. The global economy is using 40% more resources than the earth produces. Earth Overshoot Day, by when we had used up the entire year's resource allowance for 2008 was already some three weeks ago. How can we expect Mother Nature's bounty – its diversity -- not to suffer?

Former President Mikhail Gorbachev and I recently co-chaired a meeting in Turin with the aim of finding out why major warnings about likely threats to our well-being. The Limits to Growth that were predicted by Systems models more than 40 years ago by the Club of Rome and now becoming evident for many natural resources was one of these. It did not take us long to discover that one of the major reasons is the availability of reliable, validated and therefore credible scientific information.

While many doubted the scientific basis of the connection between climate change and human activity, it was the authoritative and unambiguous view of the IPCC reflecting the combined scientific work of over 3000 scientists that more or less put an end to the debate.

Today the world needs to adopt the mission to protect the biosphere just as it has done for climate change. But with the immediate political and economic crises dominating the centre stage and climate change providing a compelling backdrop, biodiversity is inexorably being pushed off the stage altogether.

To mobilise the world to help preserve our biodiversity, we must carry out equally deep scientific investigations – which our Commissions are eminently well designed to carry out – and then send out to the world a similarly unambiguous message – which our Members are uniquely positioned to do. In addition, we will need to mobilise a carefully designed media strategy to amplify and explode this message on the world stage. Clearly, IUCN is the body that can and must do this much like IPCC is doing for climate change, and if elected President setting this process in motion will be my first priority..

Going further, IUCN will have to build on its excellent initiative to analyse the economics and distributive issues of conserving or not conserving biodiversity (TEEB) and I will also propose the establishment, in collaboration with partners such as WWF and UNEP of a World Commission to investigate the deeper implications of “Green Carbon” options such as sequestration, REDD and biofuels.

It is the value of ecosystem services that will provide the strongest rationale for investing in conservation in the future. One of the most valuable ecosystem services is the knowledge accumulated over billions of years by nature – the basis of technologies that serve human needs without destroying the environment: Biomimicry. If elected, I would work to strengthen IUCN's capacity in this science.

For our conservation efforts to be in the right direction and to be sustained, they must be driven by the highest ethical considerations and a deep respect for all living things. Given its importance to planetary survival, the practice of conservation is today among the highest callings a professional can aspire to. It must therefore set the highest benchmarks for personal, scientific and ethical commitment and integrity, for which I would ask the Council to establish the necessary mechanisms to assist the Director General in ensuring these.

We need to bring the three ‘pillars’ of IUCN together in these tasks and build stronger partnerships with other organisations. We have a special position in the UN system and our voice needs to be loud, clear and heard. With a decade in academic research, another decade in government and UNEP, still another decade in an NGO and a fourth decade as an entrepreneur, I am in a position to talk the language of these groups and guide the Union in building the coalitions needed.

I have had the privilege to meet a lot of important and powerful people in my life. Presidents and kings, political leaders, captains of industry and CEOs, heads of international institutions. But I also had the even greater privilege of knowing people working on the ground, NGO workers and community activists, poor people willing to help themselves when given a chance and village women who

eke out livelihoods to sustain their families even without being given a chance. Humble and dedicated people not working in the limelight but giving a sense to the work we all do, giving a sense to the word "commitment". In that sense, I believe I can truly reflect this global-to-local and local-to-global reach that is a fundamental part of IUCN. As we start getting involved with new and sometimes bigger partners, it is important for us to keep this spirit of activism alive so that we can grow in body, capacity and influence without losing our heart or soul.

I have also had the fortune to work in many places – some one hundred countries – and in many different professional settings, which has enabled me help build strong bridges between Conservation and Development, Theory and Practice, Research and Action, the Traditional and the New, and between the North and the South.

Together with government, business is the largest destroyer of biodiversity. IUCN has little choice but to engage with both. In some cases, their impacts on the environment are wilful, in many others, simply out of ignorance or lack of understanding. Often these impacts can be reduced or eliminated by simply modifying or re-inventing business processes. The Commissions and Membership represent a strength that is unmatched. The involvement of both government and NGOs in our governance and work gives us a unique position to engage and influence business both directly and through policy interventions. To do this effectively, we need to strengthen the national and regional committees to perform both expert and watchdog roles at the grass root levels. I see the secretariat playing a largely facilitating role in working with members and commissions in achieving the goals of IUCN.

While working within the broader context of sustainable development, IUCN's particular focus has to be on its heartland of concerns -- conservation science and action -- at the highest levels of excellence and work closely with world class partners who bring the other, complementary skills needed. And within this heartland, its focus has to be as much on ecosystem processes as it is on species and habitats. If elected President, I would lay great stress on achieving this balance.

It is the job of the Council, first and foremost, to listen carefully to the members, both State and Civil Society, the scientists in the Commissions, and other external partners, and interpret their views as expressed at the General Assembly and other forums into the policies and programmes of the Union. Its perspective must be global and above particular interests, and its efforts must ensure integrity, objectivity, due process, transparency and through these, excellence. Its basic task, which as President I would expect to be judged on, is to facilitate the work and interaction of all parts of the Union, the Members, the Commissions and the Secretariat so they mutually support each other and have a clear understanding of their roles to enable the entire Union to act in unison, as a result-oriented single organism. For this, the Council must set clear policies,

the Director General must implement them and be held accountable by the Council.

In this effort, again, balance is crucial. To have an effective result-oriented Union, the Council must be able to work constructively and reasonably harmoniously with the Director General and the Secretariat. To maintain the highest levels of transparency and accountability and to ensure that the members and scientists are able to give and receive the best, they must also maintain some degree of independence and separateness.

[I have heard some dissatisfaction here among the members on the services they receive for their membership. Quite a lot of work seems to have been done to diagnose the causes of this dissatisfaction. I think we all agree on the direction even if there might be some frustration about the pace of change. But I think we have to be careful not to throw the baby out with the bath water. Personally, I can say that it is not my impression that the situation has deteriorated in the last 2 years. On the contrary, I believe things are looking up. The new DG as shown her respect and desire to work with and for members and changes are taking place; the Union's budget is growing at a healthy pace; the new programme is the result of the most extensive consultation ever done by the Secretariat. The "One Programme" approach is starting to give results and the work we do as a Union is getting more profile in the media than ever before. And just look around you! We're coming out of what is certainly the best Forum ever.]

As President, I plan to establish a one-window mechanism, something like an ombudsman function, to enable members' concerns to be heard, dealt with and responded to expeditiously. I will also explore methods for identifying and bringing on board the members needed for a strong and involved Council.

Fundraising is an important part of the work of the Union. Over the years, since I founded Development Alternatives in India, my colleagues and I have raised more than \$100 million for its research and action programmes. I believe that everyone involved in the Union should have the capacity to mobilise resources and as President I would encourage the building of such capacity among the members and the secretariat. In particular, I would initiate training programs to help our members build their capacity to mobilize the resources they need.

Under the terms of my employment with Development Alternatives in India, I am permitted (and encouraged) to devote 25% of my professional time for public service, both at the national and international level. Having completed assignments such as the National Security Board and the Science Council in the Government of India and most of my Board positions other than the Club of Rome, I can devote considerable time to the affairs of the Union.

With more than 30 years of close association with IUCN (17 of which were in the Council [as Regional Councillor (1975-78), Representative of UNEP (1978-82),

Deputy Chair and then Chair of the Commission on Environmental Planning (CEP, now CEESP, 1984-90) and again for two terms as a Regional Councillor (1988-94),] and 20 years as head of a Member NGO) I have a solid understanding of the current strengths, vulnerabilities, challenges and needs of the Union.

A new President, with the necessary breadth of experience, scientific knowledge and cultural sensibility can help IUCN in achieving this critical goal. I believe I can build on the work of previous Presidents and Councils to take IUCN to a new and higher level, in substance, in policy influence and in impact on the ground.