

IUCN Media Advisory

Human Health and the Environment

Sustainability Dialogue: Wednesday 8th October 2008, 14:30-16:00, Auditorium

The Story

Cholera spreads across Burma's Irrawaddy Delta following a devastating typhoon. West Nile virus sweeps across North America and reaches into the tropics of Central America. Soaring food prices in developing countries lead to increasing malnutrition. SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) brings tourism to a temporary halt in parts of China and Canada, demonstrating the economic impact a new disease can have. These are just a few of the health challenges facing modern society. The common factor among them is that they are all closely related to the environment and the profound impact that humans are having on the planet.

The damage caused by the 2008 Burmese typhoon was worsened by environmental degradation in the protective mangroves along the delta. West Nile virus was introduced into the US by non-native species of mosquitoes, just one of the hundreds of invasive species that are posing a major conservation problem throughout the world. The soaring food prices are due to a large extent to inappropriate management of ecosystems, with significant impacts on nature. SARS involves a complex chain of causation involving wild animals, domesticated animals and people. Avian influenza involves wild species of birds, domestic birds, and humans. The loss of biodiversity reduces the options for responding to these challenges.

The health issues facing societies in all parts of the world are gaining increasing attention, but the environmental component is often practically ignored. This Sustainability Dialogue will bring together some of the world's leading experts who are addressing the connections between these issues, and explain them in a way that clearly links the work of IUCN to the fundamental human need for a healthy environment.

Key issues

- How does human health depend on biodiversity?
- What can be done to ensure that the links between human-induced change, wild species, and infectious diseases are well understood?
- What is being done to ensure that the wild species of plants that produce effective medicines are well conserved?
- What can be done to improve the health of wild species and domesticated species, to the benefit of human well-being?

Invited / Confirmed Panelists

1. Dr. Eric Chivian, Professor Harvard Medical School, and Editor of "Sustaining Life: How Human Health Depends on Biodiversity."
2. Dr. Danna Leaman, Chair of the IUCN Medicinal Plants Specialist Group.
3. Dr. William Karesh, Co-Chair of the Animal Health Specialist Group of IUCN's Species Survival Commission.
4. Mr. Juan Mayr Maldonado, Author and Former Minister of Environment, Colombia.
5. **Moderator:** Mr. Jeff McNeely, Chief Scientist, IUCN.

Meet the Press: 16.30-17.30, Media Lounge

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Biographies of Panellists



	<p>Eric Chivian is the founder and director of the Center for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard Medical School. In 1985, he shared the Nobel Peace Prize for having co-founded the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, and in 2008 he was named by Time Magazine "one of the 100 most influential people in the world." Dr. Chivian is the lead editor and author of Oxford University Press' book <i>Sustaining Life: How Human Health Depends on Biodiversity</i>, which Al Gore said was "the most complete and powerful argument I have seen for the importance of protecting biodiversity."</p>
	<p>Dr. William B. Karesh is the co-chair of the IUCN SSC Wildlife Health Specialist Group and also serves as the President of the Working Group for Wildlife Diseases of the World Organization for Animal Health (O.I.E.). Dr. Karesh works for the Wildlife Conservation Society as the Vice President for Global Health Programs. He has pioneered initiatives focusing attention on problems raised by the interactions among wildlife, people, and their animals in many of the world's most threatened ecosystems and landscapes. Currently, Dr. Karesh is serving as the Chief of Party for the Wild Bird Global Avian Influenza Network for Surveillance (GAINS) program</p>
	<p>Dr. Danna J. Leaman is a biologist and a founding member of the Medicinal Plant Specialist Group of the Species Survival Commission, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which she has chaired since 2000. Dr Leaman is affiliated with the Canadian Museum of Nature as an associate researcher and serves as a consultant and advisor to a number of organizations around the world on conservation and sustainable use of medicinal and other useful plants.</p>

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	<p>Juan Mayr began his professional career as a photographer. His passion for environmental and cultural issues started in the 1970s in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia. He has taken on many roles, including Founder and Executive Director of Fundación Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Minister for the Environment for Colombia, President of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), President of the Extraordinary Session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, which resulted in the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, Vice-President and Regional Counsellor for the World Conservation Union (IUCN), member of the UN Secretary General's High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on Civil Society. He is currently an active member of Colombia's National Conciliation Commission, placing 'environment' as a central element on the path towards peace and reconciliation and advisor to the UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in Colombia.</p>
	<p>Jeffrey A. McNeely is Chief Scientist at IUCN, where he has worked since 1980. Before joining IUCN, he spent twelve years in Thailand, Indonesia, and Nepal, conducting research and practical application of resource management activities. He has written or edited over 40 books and 500 popular and technical articles on a wide range of environmental topics, as well as serving on the editorial board of 14 international journals. He is currently working to link biodiversity to sustainable agriculture, human health, biotechnology, climate change, energy, and more traditional fields of IUCN interest such as species, protected areas, ecosystems, and economics.</p>

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