

**The IUCN World Conservation Congress  
Barcelona, Spain**

**Closing of the World Conservation Congress 14 October 2008**

**Mr. Valli Moosa  
President of the International Union for Conservation of Nature**

Thank you, Julia.

Thank you, IUCN Members, Commissions and Secretariat.

Some call you the “three pillars” of IUCN.

Others say our dynamic parts form a “Triple Helix”.

To me, IUCN is an extraordinary vehicle for change

Driven forth by a team of three spirited horses,

To which, four years ago, you handed me the reins.

There has always been a healthy tension among that team of wild horses over how, where and which should lead.

Yet somehow all three keep pulling us forward

at a full gallop and their energy, speed and momentum generate a magic far greater than the sum of all our parts.

I have been proud and privileged to sit at the helm, an experience as exhilarating as it has been exhausting.

It gives me pleasure to hand over the reins to Ashok Khosla.

Mr. President, I wish you as exciting a journey in the next four years as I have enjoyed starting in Bangkok four years ago.

In handing over the reins, I can affirm IUCN is better organized, more responsive, more integrated, and more robust than any time in the team’s 60-year history.

You inherit a more efficient and accountable Secretariat.

You inherit more experienced and effective Commissions.

And you inherit a more diverse and committed Membership.

I step down, but my loyalty to IUCN will never end.

My commitment to conservation will not wane.

My energy will be merely transformed as I voluntarily carry on, shaping the world in the ways IUCN has identified.

The *Future of Sustainability* has taught us that the enduring conservation victories will be fought and won not only in the momentous events among world leaders, but in the daily decisions taken by billions of ordinary citizens.

This reveals a profound and encouraging shift in priorities.

For six decades IUCN's democratic principles have evolved out from a small group of quiet men in grey suits meeting behind closed doors, to our current rich and noisy array of numerous representatives dressed in colorful clothing, sandals, headdresses and face paint, meeting and laughing and sometimes crying right out in the open.

IUCN turns each human into a conservation leader, empowering her with the science and laws that she needs, and which can be used by her daughters and sons  
At the water's edge or in the depths of the forest  
or in the silences of the Sahel.

Leadership lies in daily consumptive choices, in everything we do and buy and say and go. And empowerment is small but profound: we face that vexing supermarket question -- "paper or plastic?" -- with our WCC durable cloth bag.

Then we go further, to ask: Is our food local or organic?

Do we purchase beef or tofu or peanuts and vegetables?

Do we walk, bike or drive home?

Will our meal be home cooked or prepackaged?

Is our stove electric or gas or wood-powered or solar?

Do we invest in scarce commodities or human resources? What kind of carbon offsets will be most effective?

The questions may be endless;  
the world they shape is finite  
and the time to act is running short.

During my tenure I have heard Members call, with urgency, for more aggressive leadership. We must go beyond our role in research, science, protestations and recommendations. We can no longer sit in ivory towers, safe and immune from any action. Gone are the days of being mere

observers and consultants; we are called upon to become change agents, full of guts and bravery – the kind of courage that knows the odds yet still decides to fight hard and never back down.

Decades ago my generation was inspired by John Lennon's song – 'Imagine' – about ending hunger, war, pollution and prejudice, a song that you might say "envisioned a just world that valued and conserved people and nature."

It included the chorus:

"You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one; I hope someday you'll join us, and the world will live as one."

Back then, of course, cynics dismissed these words as hopelessly naïve. Yet my tenure at IUCN has convinced me that these lyrics in fact capture not only our vision and our mission; they anchor our practical efforts on the reefs and in the forests and through the rivers, day after day.

We may have come here as dreamers,  
but we are not blind optimists or naive idealists.

Though we dare to imagine a better world,

We are visionary activists.

We are incorrigible realists.

We are economic pragmatists.

We are scientific empiricists.

And with the backing of 7,000 participants representing hundreds of millions of people around this small, fragile, beautiful and resilient world...we are not the only ones.

So we have come full circle. Our three World Conservation Congress "streams" have flowed into one vibrant current.

As our IUCN River has reached its inevitable destiny, the current spreads out, flowing unto the sea from which it will rise again and return four years later to begin its journey anew, and start fresh streams, filled with life and promise.

I look forward to sharing that journey, again and again.

Thank you, and go well.