

PERMANENT OBSERVER MISSION
of the INTERNATIONAL UNION
FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE
AND NATURAL RESOURCES
to the UNITED NATIONS

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**Statement of Achim Steiner,
Director General of IUCN — The World Conservation
Union**

at

**The High-level Plenary Meeting of the 60th Session of the
United Nations General Assembly**

**16 September 2005
New York**

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IUCN
The World Conservation Union

IUCN Statement to the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly

New York, 16 September 2005

Mr. President, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

Five years ago, in this very hall, the assembled world leaders adopted an ambitious set of targets and goals to promote peace and prosperity. Five years later, we must acknowledge that the pace of progress towards meeting these goals is too slow. We must re-double our efforts and re-focus our approaches.

In Larger Freedom, the foundation for your deliberations here today, boldly declares that: "We fundamentally depend on natural systems and resources for our existence and development. Our efforts to defeat poverty and pursue sustainable development will be in vain if environmental degradation and natural resource depletion continue unabated."

This bold declaration is supported by the findings of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, a comprehensive assessment of the state of the planet's ecosystems by nearly 1400 leading experts from 95 countries. It finds that: "The loss of services derived from ecosystems is a significant barrier to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals to reduce poverty, hunger, and disease."

This stark message was echoed by the Millennium Project, which declared that: "Integrating the principles and practices of environmental sustainability into country policies and planning programs is therefore key to successful poverty reduction strategies."

Mr. President, IUCN - The World Conservation Union welcomes the Outcome Document for its comprehensive treatment of nearly all of the major issues currently on the multilateral agenda. Yet, like many who have spoken before me, we are disappointed that it did not go further.

On the one hand, the Outcome Document reiterates the essential importance of sustainable development as part of the overarching framework for the United Nations and it addresses the crucial role of conservation and sustainable management of natural resources in eradicating poverty and in achieving the other Millennium Development Goals.

On the other hand, the Outcome Document fails to appreciate how much we still have to do to achieve environmental sustainability and all of the other MDGs. Fifteen of the 24 essential services provided by ecosystems - ranging from food production to water quality and availability, disease management and climate regulation - are being used unsustainably and persistently eroded.

This situation requires an urgent response: we must ensure that the United Nations, civil society and the private sector nurture and maintain the environmental foundation of sustainable livelihoods.

Mr. President, rather than being a "tax on development", investing in environmental sustainability should be seen as an effective and efficient means to achieve development. To cite just one concrete example, replacing traditional biomass fuels used by the poor yields multiple benefits in terms of time savings for women and children, improved health through reduced indoor air pollution, reduced environmental damage from fuelwood cutting, and improved soil quality from increased dung available for fertilizer.

A recent study by the Poverty Environment Partnership describes state of the art experience from Kenya which shows astounding benefit to cost ratios ranging from 47:1 to 118:1 for investments in improved

household stove technology. The study also documents evidence from around the world that returns on investments in water and sanitation show benefit-cost ratios of between 4:1 and 14:1; agroforestry investments show benefit-cost ratios from 1.7 to 6.1; and wetlands and mangrove conservation investments show ratios of 1.2 to 7.4.

Mr. President, for our part, the World Conservation Union will continue to support the multilateral processes related to the Millennium Development Goals by bringing the best knowledge available to decision-making.

We also pledge to work with the Poverty-Environment Partnership and our 1072 government and non-government members to make conservation work more effectively for the poor. We are therefore announcing our Conservation for Poverty Reduction Initiative, a worldwide, US\$300 million plan of action of over 100 partner organizations that will target improved livelihood security in 20 countries for 50 million people.

This initiative is only one more stride in the race to achieve the MDGs by 2015, to eradicate poverty and to ensure sustainable livelihoods. Mr. President, in order to make poverty history, we need to make environment the future.

Thank you Mr. President.

Created in 1948, IUCN - The World Conservation Union brings together 79 States, 114 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 1000 staff located in 62 countries. Its headquarters are in Gland, Switzerland.