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22 countries, 1 sea, 1 future

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) closed the Mediterranean gathering with a new impulse towards cooperation

Malaga, Spain, 8 September, 2007 (IUCN) – After four days of debate in Malaga, key nature conservation actors have wrapped up the meeting with a conviction: the future of environment lays in cooperation and the involvement of the society as a whole, including the private sector. Development and human wellbeing cannot take place without a long term vision to mitigate the negative effects of human action over the natural resources upon which we all depend.

Participants recognised the essential role played by the IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation in Malaga in bringing together the interests and capacities of different social sectors towards conservation in the Mediterranean and recognised that North-South cooperation through initiatives such as a shared management plan between Spain and Morocco for the Alboran Sea, the unification of policies to regulate maritime traffic, a more efficient management of terrestrial, coastal and marine protected areas or some practical recommendations for the development of aquaculture in the Mediterranean are of utmost importance for the whole Region.

Amongst the conclusions reached by governments, scientists, international organisations and NGOs from the riparian countries, it was decided to focus the work of the World Conservation Union, and in particular that of the Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation, in the following framework:

- Enhanced cooperation with North African countries through the development of a subregional programme for 2009-2012;
- Protection of the marine environment, in particular the aspects related to governance of the high seas, which was identified as a challenge for the region;
- Creation of coherent and unified conservation policies for the whole region. In particular, the development of red lists of endangered species at national and Mediterranean level is a step forward and a priority in this context. IUCN methodology was recognised as the only independent one and as the best way to unify data and methods. Red Lists establish priorities for conservation based on scientific data and objective analysis, which reinforced the importance of continuing the support to this imperative task in the whole region.

Participants also identified as a priority for biodiversity conservation in the Mediterranean the problem of invasive species, and called upon technical cooperation and common and coordinated actions to manage this problem.

Additionally, experts reached the conclusion that the only way to ensure conservation in the long term is by linking terrestrial and marine ecosystems through integrated management. Participants called upon a coherent and representative network of protected areas across the Mediterranean, including land and sea ecosystems.

Once more, the need to develop partnerships and cooperation projects between the North and the South, as well as South and South, was highlighted in numerous themes such as protected areas, marine conservation, tourism and sustainable development, etc.

A key idea was reaffirmed during the meeting: conventional conservation - geared only towards the environment - is now an old paradigm. In today's world, development and socio-economic wellbeing are no longer independent from environmental conservation.

Biodiversity is the base for human development and well being and the 2009-2012 working programme for IUCN both at global and at Mediterranean level will be developed under this premise. The interest and presence of the private sector in conservation was confirmed during this meeting, with the active participation of companies such as Cepsa, Unicaja and the Malaga Chamber of Commerce, as well as the renewed engagement to work with the Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation, with a special interest in energy, aquaculture, climate change and a more sustainable tourism.

During the meeting, the specificity of certain Mediterranean ecosystems was highlighted, specially mountains, dry-lands, island and oasis (in North Africa). Representatives from different countries asked IUCN to promote cooperation for conservation and to enhance the livelihoods of those living around them and for those who use the goods and services of these ecosystems to survive.

Sharing knowledge and capacity building were particularly requested through cooperation measures such as twinning and other exchanges to foster a better understanding of regional challenges and the different ways to convert them into opportunities. The need for the North to learn from the South was also highlighted and basically relevant to traditional knowledge practices and other successful experiences. Other international organisations such as the European Commission, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Italy or the Mava Foundation were also present to explain financing mechanisms and cooperation programmes for Mediterranean countries.

The official presentation by the Andalusia regional government, Consejería de Medio Ambiente, of the new book on the "Use of IUCN Protected Area Management Categories in the Mediterranean Region" also took place during these days.

The participants from the Mediterranean countries welcomed the announcement by the Major of the Malaga city council to establish a cooperation centre for climate change in Malaga, in collaboration with the IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation, and reaffirmed their commitment to the Naples Declaration resulting from the meeting held in Italy, in June 2004.

This gathering has been possible thanks to the support of the Diputación de Malaga, Consejería de Medio Ambiente of Andalusia's regional government, the Ministry of Environment of Spain, Malaga Chamber of Commerce, Unicaja and Malaga City council which has signed, as well as Unicaja, a collaboration agreement with IUCN to make Malaga the environmental capital of the Mediterranean.

The conclusions reached in Malaga by the 21 countries in the region will be presented during the next World Conservation Congress to be held in October 2008 in Barcelona.

Notes to editors

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About the World Conservation Union (IUCN)

Created in 1948, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) brings together 84 States, 110 government agencies, 800 plus NGOs, and some 10,000 scientists and experts from 181 countries in a unique worldwide partnership. The Union'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. The Union is the world's largest environmental knowledge network and has helped over 75 countries to prepare and implement national conservation and biodiversity strategies. The Union is a multicultural, multilingual organization with 1,000 staff located in 64 countries. Its headquarters are in Gland, Switzerland.

The IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation is based in Malaga since 2001, with more than 160 member organizations in the region and an average staff of 14 people.

More information can be found at www.uicnmed.org and www.iucn.org