

Statement to the United Nations General Assembly

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**United Nations General Assembly  
Informal Consultative Process on the  
Institutional Framework for  
The United Nations' Environmental Activities**

**Delivered by Narinder Kakar,  
Permanent Observer to the United Nations**

10 September 2007

New York

# **United Nations General Assembly Informal Consultative Process on the Institutional Framework for the United Nations' Environmental Activities**

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Thank you Mr. Co-Chair,

The World Conservation Union, IUCN, welcomes the resumed deliberations on the institutional framework for the UN environmental activities.

IUCN would like to start by stressing the urgency of moving forward to enable the international environmental governance system to address the challenges before us. Mr. Co-Chair, the current environmental problems are unprecedented: biodiversity is being lost at 1000 times natural background levels, 60% of the world's ecosystems are degraded, desertification gains more and more productive lands especially in the poorest countries and the levels of CO<sub>2</sub> continue to increase with serious impacts on our climate. This environmental degradation is affecting, and will increasingly affect, the wellbeing of our societies, but also our economic growth and development.

We welcome the efforts of the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary General in conveying the urgency to act in the face of climate change. The current discussions on international environmental governance are part of the needed response.

Mr. Co-Chair, your Options Paper of 14 June 2007 and the summary of the first round of consultations of 27 June 2006, provide a very useful assessment of the weaknesses of the current international governance system and concrete options to move forward. These, together with the report of the High-level Panel on System-Wide Coherence issued on 9 November 2006 and previous discussions in the context of the Cartagena process, provide a solid basis on which to take the actions required.

We are thus concerned with the timetable proposed, with terms of reference for negotiations to be developed at the beginning of the 63<sup>rd</sup> session of the General Assembly and negotiations starting at the 64<sup>th</sup> session. We urge Member States to bridge the current obstacles so that the General Assembly can make the needed progress through incremental measures to get a system that responds to the current environmental challenges, and that enables the achievement of the targets set by Heads of State and Government to reverse the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010, establish a network of protected areas by 2012 and to achieve sustainability (MDG 7) by 2015.

Before addressing the specific building blocks identified in your paper, IUCN would like to stress, as we mentioned in previous opportunities, that the present discussions should contribute to making sustainable development part of the "overarching framework of United Nations activities", as called for in resolution 57/253 of the General Assembly. In this context, the ultimate goal of international environmental governance should be to ensure that the environmental goods and services upon which human wellbeing and development depend are provided in a sustainable and equitable manner in all countries. The institutions and processes that the international community uses to achieve this goal therefore should effectively and efficiently promote environmental sustainability through their own operations and mainstream environmental sustainability throughout other institutions and processes.

In this context, IUCN believes that further consideration is needed in the Options Paper to the need to integrate sustainability throughout the operations of the United Nations (UN) and beyond outside of the environmental sphere and thus, to implement resolution 57/253. The current weakness in this regard should, in our view, be incorporated in the assessment of the "Current System of International Environmental

Governance” in the Options Paper. A more active role could also be played by UN bodies with an environmental mandate in this regard. Importantly, the discussions on the wider UN reform process, including the recommendations of the report of the High Level Panel on System Wide Coherence, need to be closely linked with the present deliberations. We suggest some actions in this regard in our comments on the Building Blocks proposed in the Options Paper.

Concerning ***Building Block 1 on Scientific assessment, monitoring and early warning capacity:***

IUCN agrees with the need to strengthen the scientific assessment, monitoring and early warning capacity. We believe that UNEP’s role should be to convene and catalyze existing authoritative scientific knowledge on the environment from sources within the United Nations system, but also from non governmental sources. IUCN, for example, provides authoritative knowledge on the status of species, including its Red List of Threatened Species, and supports national species assessments. It is thus essential to build connectivity and to develop standards and indicators across existing sources of scientific information. The development of assessments on the status of the environment also needs to draw on such sources, following the experience of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment.

Concerning the scientific bodies of multilateral environmental agreements, we would like to mention the meeting of chairs of the scientific bodies of biodiversity-related agreements that took place on 1 June in Paris in the context of a meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The continuation of this important process needs to be supported and amplified to other cluster areas, as it responds to the needs for cooperation identified in the Options Paper.

IUCN also wishes to stress the need to build capacities at national level with support from existing organizations and with appropriate resources, to enable national assessment and monitoring processes.

Concerning ***Building Block 2 on Coordination and cooperation at the level of agencies:***

IUCN agrees with the recommendation to enhance the partnership between UNEP – with its analytical and normative capacity - and UNDP – with its operational capacity - to provide technical support and capacity building on environmental matters at the country level. The proposal included in the Options Paper to further clarify their roles, as well as that of other relevant organizations, in the implementation of the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity Building should further enhance support of the UN at national level, with appropriate environmental expertise under the Resident Coordinator system and country teams. This would be critical to enable the inclusion of environmental sustainability and of the strategies developed under the Multilateral Environmental Agreements in national poverty reduction and development strategies.

A strengthened and refocused Environmental Management Group (EMG) and an enhanced role of UNEP in the UN Development Group should also contribute to greater coordination.

One aspect that in our view needs to be included in the Options Paper is the important role that UNEP can play, working with the Environment Management Group, in the development of environmental and social safeguard policies and guidelines to be incorporated in all the work of the UN system and beyond (e.g. WTO, IFIs). An enhanced contribution from UNEP and the EMG to the Chief Executive Board for Coordination (CEB) would be critical in integrating sustainability throughout the system. It is important to stress here that the proposal of the High Level Panel to establish a UN Sustainable Development Board of course signifies a major change that would effectively make sustainable development the overarching framework of the UN.

Concerning ***Building Block 3 on Multilateral Environmental Agreements:***

IUCN agrees that more coordination among Multilateral Environmental Agreements should be possible around issue-based clusters, following the successful experience with chemicals, including co-location of secretariats and meetings, streamlined reporting and coordinated scientific assessments.

A function of the International Environmental Governance system that in our view requires increased consideration is the need to support the implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements and to do

this in a coordinated manner. Considerable efforts have been made by countries to develop national strategies under these agreements, but little progress has been made in their implementation.

**On *Building Blocks 4 and 5 on Regional presence and activities at the regional level and the Bali Strategic Plan, capacity building and technological support:***

IUCN strongly believes that significant capacity building is needed to strengthen country-level implementation. The Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-Building provides a comprehensive and agreed framework, including needs for scientific knowledge, normative/policy advice and operational support, as well as priority thematic areas. In IUCN's view, an analysis of existing assessments of needs under the different Multilateral Environmental Agreements, including synergies among them, could further refine the Bali Plan in relevant areas. This framework should be the basis for coordinated support to national efforts, through the enhanced collaboration between UNEP and UNDP under the Resident Coordinator and UN country teams. UNEP's regional presence could also be strengthened to provide support for national capacity building work. There is also a need to move decisively with adequate resources towards the implementation of the Bali Plan.

**Concerning *Building Block 6 on IT, partnerships and advocacy:***

IUCN wishes to stress that effective reforms of the system should facilitate the engagement of civil society in the environmental work of the UN. We thus welcome the inclusion of this point in your building blocks, given the important role played by non-state actors in areas such as provision of knowledge, capacity building and mobilization of political action. We also support the proposal to adapt UN rules and regulations in order to facilitate such activity. It is also important that the UN promotes opportunities to further engage the private sector in its efforts to achieve sustainable development.

**On *Building Block 7 on Financing:***

An effective environmental governance system needs to mobilize financial resources for sustainable development. In this context, IUCN agrees with the need to strengthen the financial basis of UNEP and, importantly, to increase "the financial basis of global environmental policy implementation and capacity building" included in the Options Paper. We strongly agree in this regard with the recommendation of the High Level Panel on System Wide Coherence to strengthen the GEF as a major financial mechanism for the environment with a review of its contributions and significant increase in resources. Environment also needs to be mainstreamed in development cooperation to support national efforts to achieve sustainable development.

In closing, IUCN wishes to support the proposal for a more sustained engagement of the General Assembly in monitoring its decisions, including on International Environmental Governance and we suggest in this context to follow up implementation of decision 57/253.

Mr. Co-Chair, this is an important time for improving the environmental governance system now that this issue is before this Assembly. Political will is needed to make the necessary reforms to address the unprecedented environmental problems resulting from human activities to ensure sustainability and prosperity in all parts of the world. IUCN stands ready to support your efforts.

Thank you Mr. Co-Chair.

Created in 1948, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) brings together 83 States, 110 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 1,100 staff located in 40 countries.