

Suncheon NGO Declaration

27 October 2008

Suncheon City, Republic of Korea

1. We, the members of the World NGO Conference on Wetlands, are very much honoured by the opportunity to deliver a Declaration to the 10th Conference of Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.
2. Aware of the participatory principles of the Convention, the World NGO Conference on Wetlands 2008 has been a multi-stakeholder conference attended by more than 400 members of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), indigenous peoples, local communities and local government administrations from 31 countries on 6 continents, all of whom are committed to the conservation and restoration of wetlands. The Conference was held at Changnyeong County, Gyeongsang-nam-do Province, and Suncheon City, Jeolla-nam-do, Republic of Korea from 25 to 27 October, 2008. We, the participants of the World NGO Conference on Wetlands, unanimously appreciate the Suncheon City and Changnyeong County governments for generously providing us facilities and support for our NGO Conference.
3. Considering recommendations made at the closing ceremony of COP9 (2005) for the active participation of NGOs, the Korean NGO Network facilitated the World NGO Conference on Wetlands to discuss issues and confirm the roles and responsibilities of NGOs in the conservation and restoration of wetlands. Presentations focused on wetlands Communication, Education, Participation, and Awareness (CEPA), biodiversity of rice paddies, the wise use and non-wise use of wetlands, and evaluation of the implementation of the Ramsar Convention. Extensive discussions led to the drafting of the Suncheon NGO Declaration.
4. Noting the need for effective networking of stakeholders in the implementation process of the Convention, a “World Wetland Network” was formed to facilitate and enhance information sharing and transfer of “best practices” in regards to planning, monitoring, and management of wetlands and to create a shared vision among stakeholders.
5. In relation to Draft Resolution X.1 “The Ramsar Strategic Plan 2009-2014”: We urge the Conference of the Contracting Parties to emphasize to each contracting party the importance of the following points in the implementation of the convention. The agencies carrying out development projects and the agency in charge of the convention should hold an inclusive consultative process on the resolutions of the Convention. Contracting Parties should organize a national wetland committee comprised of related government agencies, local governments, experts, and NGOs, and develop strategies for the wise use of wetlands. Contracting Parties and the International Organization Partners should cooperate more with NGOs, local and indigenous people. A broad-based management committee involving local

stakeholders should be established for each Ramsar site.

6. In relation to DR X.8 “The Convention’s Programme on communication, education, participation and awareness (CEPA) 2009-2014”: We support this draft resolution in that it focuses on the importance of “participation” in CEPA activities. However, the number of parties that have not yet specified CEPA Focal Points, especially NGO Focal Points, is considerable. We urge Contracting Parties to appoint focal points as soon as possible so that NGOs can easily participate in CEPA programmes. We envisage the facilitation of the participation of NGOs by the Contracting Parties by financial means, where needed.
7. In relation to DR X.13 “The status of sites in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance”: The Ramsar Convention aims for the conservation and wise use of all wetlands as well as designated wetlands of international importance. We urge the Contracting Parties to identify all wetlands in the country which fit the criteria to be listed as a Ramsar Site, to prioritise these sites and then to designate sites according to a clearly defined timetable. Each country should aim to designate the best example of each type of wetland habitat under their jurisdiction as a Ramsar Site.
8. We urge the COP to respect the deep concern expressed by Resolution IX.15 of COP9 (2005) about the Saemangeum Reclamation project, and to introduce a new Resolution to protect and restore sites which are eligible for designation as Ramsar sites, but where the national governments have not yet done so. (Article 6.2d). The Saemangeum Reclamation project and recently adopted Coastal Area Development Law are indicative of destructive development projects and policies that ignore the voices of those people who value the cultural and ecological aspects of wetlands, especially those whose livelihoods depend on wetlands.
9. We support DR X.23 “Wetlands and human health and well-being” and the COP10 Theme of “Healthy Wetlands and Healthy People” as we recognize the central link between healthy ecosystems and human health.
10. In relation to DR X.28 “Wetlands and poverty reduction,” we are very concerned that many people are losing their jobs and livelihoods, cultural diversity and/or traditional life, and forced to live in poverty. We should stop unsustainable and destructive developments and use wetlands wisely for poverty reduction. National policies should promote the wise use of wetlands as integral to poverty reduction through local food production, ecotourism, recreation activities and other ecosystem services.
11. DR X.31 “Enhancing biodiversity in rice paddies as wetland systems”: We support this draft resolution X.31 particularly due to the following three points. Sustainable rice paddy agriculture supports biodiversity including waterbirds and provides vital wetland habitats. It raises awareness about the value of rice paddies for biodiversity in the lead-up to the Convention of Biological Diversity COP10 to be held in Japan in 2010. Finally, we applaud the

receptiveness of the Japanese and Korean governments to this NGO-led proposal for DR X.31. Although we support sustainable rice paddy agriculture in preference to urbanization and dry agriculture, rice paddies should not replace natural wetlands.

12. Recognising the fact that resolutions from previous COP have not been fulfilled, especially Resolution VII.21 adopted by COP7 (1999) regarding mangroves, participants of the World NGO Conference on Wetlands met informally to discuss these issues. We urge governments to implement these resolutions, particularly Resolution VII.21 which calls on governments to suspend the promotion, creation of new facilities and expansion of unsustainable aquaculture activities harmful to coastal wetlands.
13. In relation to DR. 25 “Wetlands and Biofuels,” we express deep concern about the increasing demand for biofuel crops as it is a direct threat to wetlands and wetland-friendly agricultural practices and the local communities relying on them. Also, biofuel crops should not compromise food security and biodiversity within countries.
14. We propose to set up an “International Wetlands Restoration Award” to encourage Contracting Parties to restore wetlands damaged by past development or natural causes. This award would recognize the efforts of the government, NGOs, and people in the awarded country, and disseminate best and forward-looking practices to other countries for them to put into practice in the future. The restoration efforts should be conducted in a sustainable and ethical manner, without further destruction of the surrounding environment.
15. Finally, we NGOs, local and indigenous people pledge to continue our efforts, in co-operation with Convention Secretariat, national governments, and IOPs to disseminate what the Convention has achieved and to promote wise use of wetlands, carrying out activities based on the local sites themselves. Moreover, we will disseminate traditional and indigenous knowledge of community groups through the CEPA process, in order to conserve wetland sustainability while respecting local customs.

Adopted and signed

This day 27 October 2008.

In Suncheon, Republic of Korea

Annex: List of concerned wetlands (to be distributed later)