

**Opening remarks of IUCN Director General Julia Marton-Lefèvre at the High-level Luncheon discussion on “Gender inequality — A Constraint to economic growth, environment protection, poverty reduction and sustainable development: Linkages between MDGs 1, 3 and 7”**

New York, 21 September 2010

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

My name is Julia Marton-Lefèvre and I am the Director General of IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

It is my great honour to welcome you to this high-level luncheon hosted by IUCN together with the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, with generous support from the Office of the President of Finland and the Millennium Challenge Corporation.

A little while ago, during my travels in an African country, I met this charming woman who sustained her rather large family by collecting and selling medicinal plants from the forest. She would have never heard the terms “gender mainstreaming” or “promoting the MDGs” or “biodiversity conservation”, but in her daily work she was doing exactly that.

We are here today to discuss ways in which we can help her, and countless other women around the world, by closing the gender gap — in order to lift them out of poverty, empower them, and offer them sustainable development alternatives.

We are here because we know that addressing the gender issue is key to achieving sustainable development and the millennium goals.

IUCN is the international environmental institution with the longest record in the promotion of gender equality – since 1984.

Long before the world made a commitment to the MDGs, IUCN stated its intention to ensure that gender equality considerations would be fully reflected into the sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity and natural resources.

IUCN enjoys worldwide recognition for the extensive work it has carried out over the past 15 years addressing gender equity issues within the environmental sector. For example, it helped establish gender entities in environmental ministries throughout Latin America.

As a founding member of the Global Gender and Climate Alliance (GGCA), IUCN has been supporting the development of gender and climate change strategies in Mozambique and the Central American climate change regional strategy. In the next months we will be supporting the development of policies in Jordan, Bahrain, Ghana, Mexico, Guatemala and Egypt.

Furthermore, IUCN has provided support to UNEP and the CBD to develop gender action plans, in addition to training over 15,000 staff from governments, international NGOs such as CARE and Oxfam, and UN agencies including UNDP and UNIFEM on incorporating gender issues in their work.

Speaking about the UN system, let me say that IUCN applauds the establishment of UN Women; the new gender entity aiming to consolidate various UN efforts in achieving gender equality and empowerment of women.

However as IUCN we recognize that still there are major challenges ahead of us.

As the UN 2010 progress report states, “Gender equality and the empowerment of women are at the heart of the MDGs and are preconditions for overcoming poverty, hunger and disease. But progress has been sluggish on all fronts—from education to access to political decision-making.”

As we all know, the third Millennium Development Goal is dedicated to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. But when we look at the other seven goals, it is clear that none of them are possible without the inclusion of gender considerations and an improved situation for the women of the world.

We can eradicate poverty and hunger, but only if we fully involve women’s voices in the decisions that are made on, for example, agriculture and biodiversity, since they provide up to 90% of the rural poor’s food and up to 80% of food in developing countries.

And the relation between women empowerment and the other MDGs is obvious:

We can achieve universal primary education, as long as we ensure equal opportunities and a safe environment for our girls to get to school.

We already know that most maternal deaths could be avoided, and by providing universal access to reproductive health care for all women and we can vastly improve global maternal health.

By saving the mothers, we can help save their children. Integrating gender interests can help to guarantee the safe and sustainable use of natural resources which contribute to the food safety and security that is essential to reducing child mortality – we CAN cut this by two-thirds.

We can win our fight against HIV, TB and Malaria – but the empowerment and education of women is crucial to achieving that goal.

As Director General of IUCN, it goes without saying that I firmly and dearly believe in the attainability of sustainable development and reversal of the loss of our environmental resources, and yet to do that, we must integrate gender consideration every step of the way.

And as for a global partnership for development? Well that is why we are here, isn’t it?

We are here because we all know that truly global partnerships for development by definition are only possible when both men and women have an equal and equitable say.

We are here because we know that addressing the gender issue is key to achieving sustainable development and the millennium goals.

And we are here because we believe it is possible, and that if we put our minds and efforts together we can succeed.