



CONVENTION ON WETLANDS
CONVENTION SUR LES ZONES HUMIDES
CONVENCIÓN SOBRE LOS HUMEDALES
(Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

**Message from Ms Martha Rojas-Urrego
Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands
on the occasion of the International Day for Biological Diversity:
Biodiversity and Sustainable Tourism**

22 May 2017

We welcome the 2017 International Day for Biological Diversity which is dedicated to the theme of 'Biodiversity and Sustainable Tourism.'

Tourism is one of the driving forces of global economic growth, and currently accounts for 1 in 11 jobs worldwide. International tourism is expected to rise to 1.8 billion by 2030. Domestic tourism is even more significant with estimates pointing to 4 billion domestic tourists worldwide.

Conventional tourism represents threats to the environment across the world. It can put enormous pressure on natural areas and lead to impacts such as land degradation, increased pollution, discharges into wetlands, natural habitat loss, and increased pressure on species. With increasing trend for nature-based tourism, the theme 'Biodiversity and Sustainable Tourism' offers an opportunity to showcase how well-managed, sustainable tourism can be beneficial and can generate an important income for local populations and at the same time contribute to conservation of the natural world.

Through the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the global network of more than 2,200 Wetlands of International Importance ('Ramsar Sites') which are used and managed sustainably, the Convention is not only contributing to the conservation of these Sites with an extraordinary biodiversity but also in achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets of the Convention on Biological Diversity thus consequently contributing to other global agendas such as sustainable development goals.

Wetlands are amongst the most productive of the world's ecosystems sustaining our lives. They are critical for biodiversity - home to more than 100,000 freshwater species alone. They are essential to fish and bird life, breeding and migration. Wetlands include aesthetic, recreational and spiritual values. It is these values that explain why wetlands are such popular tourist destinations, attracting millions of visitors each year.

With half of all international tourists travelling to wetlands, especially to beaches in coastal areas, and the additional value of domestic tourism and recreational day trips, the economic value of wetland tourism is enormous.

The Wadden Sea, one of the largest tourist destinations in Europe, is the largest Transboundary Ramsar Site stretching across Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands. It is an example that well-managed, sustainable tourism hugely contributes to the local economy and at the same time contributes to the conservation of wetlands and biodiversity.

The Wadden Sea boasts some impressive statistics in terms of tourism, wildlife and environment. 10 million tourists visit the Wadden Sea per year. € 3-5 billion is an estimated yearly turnover of tourism. At the same time 6 million migratory birds can be present at the same time in the Wadden Sea, and an average of 10-12 million pass through it autumn and spring every year. The Wadden Sea is protected and managed as one ecological entity and there is a consistent approach to tourism operations within the area.

In April this year the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), leading authority on global travel and tourism industry, announced its 2017 Destination Award for the Okavango Delta Ramsar Site in Botswana. The Site was awarded based on the sustainable tourism practices seeking to minimize impacts while maximizing benefits to the local population.

In both examples tourism benefits from conservation policies as visitors expect intact nature and conservation measures.

Examples of the Wadden Sea and the Okavango Delta Ramsar Sites show the contribution of sustainable tourism both to economic growth and to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. They have a potential to be reproduced and inspire other countries around the world.