

OTHER INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

IUCN

50th Anniversary

Heads of State, leaders of the world's conservation movement, scientists and business leaders gathered in Fontainebleau, France, from 3–5 November, 1998, to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of IUCN – The World Conservation Union, in the town where it was founded. IUCN is the world's largest conservation-related organisation.

The three-day event was opened by the French President, *Jacques Chirac*, and closed by Prime Minister *Lionel Jospin*. Other leaders attending included the *President of Burkina Faso*, the *President of Mali*, the *President of the Swiss Confederation*, *Prince Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah of Nepal*, *Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan*, and *Queen Noor of Jordan*, who is IUCN's patron.

Background

The Organisation was founded in 1948, to add an environmental aspect to international development discussions and IUCN is now seen as the first multilateral environmental organisation.

It originally comprised 18 signatory governments, seven international organisations and 107 national organisations. Today, IUCN forms a "network of conservation networks" with 900 governmental and non-governmental members in 138 countries.

With 46 offices worldwide, the IUCN – with 800 employees and a network of 12,000 registered researchers and scientists – has been an active player in the formation of and follow-up on a host of environmental treaties and conventions, including those on biodiversity protection, desertification, wetlands conservation, and trade in endangered species.

Opening Speeches

Queen Noor called on IUCN to devote significant effort to linking environment and security. "The Middle East is typical of how environment-based issues can impact negatively on political and regional events", she said, noting that "we in Jordan made equitable water sharing a cornerstone of our 1994 peace accord with Israel."

In his address, the *President of Burkina Faso*, linked the problem of desertification with that of the financial situation of many affected countries. He stressed that "creditor countries must adopt universal policies on developing countries' external debt." He proposed that the G-7 countries should adopt a debt-for-environment swap as a principal means of reducing bilateral debt. He added that multilateral credit agencies and private sector banks should be encouraged to do the same.

Desertification was also a key theme in the address presented by the *President of Mali*. "There is an environmental crisis in Africa linked to the lack of hydrological resources, and while the world watches, the desert keeps advancing," he said.

He insisted that developing countries will be unable to implement the UN Convention to Combat Desertification without external aid. "The international cooperation measures that have been put in place to fight desertification since the Rio Earth Summit have laid the foundation



for future actions, ... but the effort is doomed to failure if countries cannot agree on the implementation of a financing mechanism within the treaty that meets the needs of those suffering from desertification."

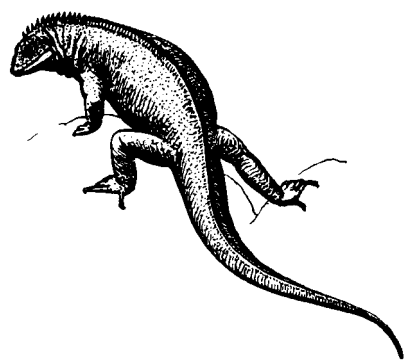
President Chirac responded to these demands during his speech. He noted that the transition to sustainable development is one of the great tasks ahead of us for the 21st century, and in order to make this transition successfully together, "we must all adopt a pro-active, coherent and global approach. I have come here today to propose France's responses," he said.

"First of all, ... we must abandon three long-standing beliefs which are entrenched in our thinking, but which the 20th century has rendered obsolete ... It is presumptuous to believe that humanity has the intelligence always to repair the errors committed in the name of progress.

Next, we must organise the management of global risks on a planetary scale. Certainly, the international community has taken the measure of the urgency of providing global responses, as witnessed by the major post-Rio conventions. But the current stalemate in trying to implement them has brought to light the existence of serious obstacles."

The first obstacle, he said, flows from the determination of States to cling to *an outmoded conception of their sovereignty* in this area. But interdependence calls for universal regulating mechanisms, for impartial and effective arrangements for the implementation and control of commitments entered into.

"We must start by establishing an impartial and indisputable global centre for the evaluation of our environ-



ment. The first instruments for this purpose exist already. But they are scattered among many different international organisations. We need a single place that embodies the environmental conscience of the world. The United Nations Environment Programme, now engaged in a courageous and promising reform, should be responsible for putting this into effect. It should be given the task of coordinating the scattered secretariats of the great conventions, gradually establishing a World Authority, based on a general convention that endows the world with a uniform doctrine.

Finally, we must further improve the way in which the major international economic organisations incorporate environmental concerns into their work. Progress is starting to be made at the World Bank and the UNDP. The time has come to work on this at the WTO.”

The French President then noted that the second obstacle to sound management of global risks is the *confrontation between North and South*, which has sharpened in recent years. Although the industrialised countries do bear the chief responsibility for damage to the environment, it is also true that the rest of the world will have to shoulder growing responsibility tomorrow, he said. “The countries in transition, the emerging countries, and the poor countries all understand this well ... Their big problem is the cost of know-how and technology transfers. How can we help them finance the acquisition of these? Here is a vital issue that demands our urgent attention ... The time has come for a wider approach, one that amplifies the efforts being made within the Commission on Sustainable Development.”

With that in mind, *President Chirac* said he proposed to host an international meeting in France, in 1999. Its mandate will be to identify credible mechanisms to facilitate transfers of technology and know-how in every area threatening the environment.

He noted that political and legal conceptions also need to evolve. “We are still far from having arrived at a precise definition of the notion of sustainable development. We have yet to set a threshold to our demands, a benchmark which we can define as the ‘ideal condition of the environment,’ a method of weighing the benefits and drawbacks stemming from our decisions,” he said.

“Rigorous application of the precautionary principle presupposes more systematic analysis of risks and the formulation of new procedures. In the face of uncer-

tainty, scientists, political leaders, business people and the citizen must work together to debate and determine the best choices ... These discussions will help to drive forward our environmental legislation, in terms of impact studies, application of the polluter-pays principle, tax regimes, and liability for damage to the environment.”*

This was *President Chirac’s* first major environmental policy statement since taking office in 1995, and was seen by observers as a signal of the importance the French government grants the IUCN.

Lionel Jospin, speaking at the closing ceremony, supported *President Chirac’s* initiative in his closing remarks, and highlighted two themes that emerged from the three-day event. “The first is the need to change consumption patterns,” he said, “and the second is the emphasis on the links between environment and security.” He also echoed the comments of *Queen Noor*, stating that the Middle East is typical of how environment-based issues can impact negatively on political and regional events.

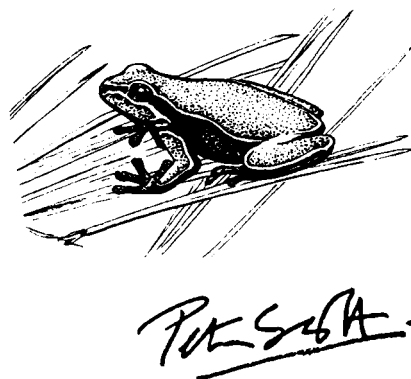
He proposed that France take a lead role in the formation of an international convention on forestry that could offer “a framework for the protection and sustainable management of the world’s forests.”

(Our readers will remember that negotiations have stagnated since the 1992 Rio Conference, with developing countries opposed to the creation of binding rules that could limit their exploitation of natural resources.)

Lionel Jospin suggested that France’s experience with sustainable forestry and biodiversity protection – notably in tropical forests in the Overseas Administrative Region of French Guyana – could serve as a model for developing countries.

He reminded delegates that after celebrating the 50th anniversary of IUCN they would also celebrate that of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. “The IUCN has brought us a present for that anniversary: the reaffirmation of the right to environmental security.”

The Prime Minister acknowledged “the remarkable undertaking” that IUCN President *Kakabadse* had achieved by helping to orchestrate the recently announced treaty between Ecuador and Peru which ended some 60 years of border conflicts. He was referring to the peace park concept, an IUCN-supported glo-



bal approach that uses protected natural areas as a means to encourage co-operation between tense neighbours. He encouraged IUCN to do more to mediate conflicts through better management and access to natural resources.

Conference Highlights

These included the launch of the Reuters-IUCN Media Awards, aimed at promoting excellence in environmental reporting, the first award of its kind at global level; the creation of an IUCN Business Advisory Panel, which will provide a forum for senior representatives of the corporate world to advise IUCN on partnership opportunities to promote sustainable development; and a celebration of cultural diversity in support of the environment, which brought together musicians from eight countries.

Business Advisory Panel

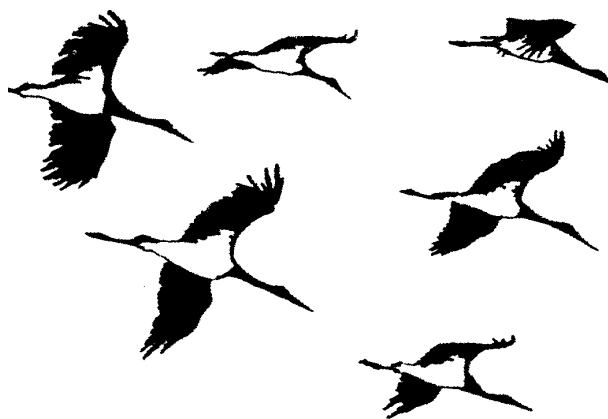
In announcing the new partnership with the corporate sector, IUCN President *Yolanda Kakabadse*, reminded business leaders that their important responsibilities to help conserve nature go hand in hand with business opportunities, providing the resource base remains intact. IUCN will invite corporate leaders, acting in their individual capacities, to join the panel. The group will be established in 1999, and will advise the Union on how to forge long-term working relationships to unite the conservation world with key industrial sectors.

The IUCN President noted that "the private sector manages a high proportion of the world's natural resources, so you are a major stakeholder. Your future depends, to a large extent, on how intelligently you manage nature. IUCN will seek to influence your policies and practices – and we accept that you may wish to influence our thinking and actions," she said.

In explaining why biodiversity is important to business, *Yolanda Kakabadse* said "the next century will truly be the biological century in which much of the world's prosperity will be based on biological resources. At the same time, we must take up the challenge of consuming fewer resources, of becoming more efficient – producing more with less."

She specifically called on all business sectors which benefit from and have an impact on biological diversity – agriculture, pharmaceuticals, oil and gas, mining, forestry, fisheries, and also communications and financial services – to establish corporate biodiversity plans by the end of 2000.

The President of Volkswagen France, *Michel Le Paire*, in announcing the first major long-term corporate sponsorship with IUCN, underlined the need for IUCN's international profile to match "its global role as the world's biggest network of scientists and environmental specialists. It is surprising that an organisation of this stat-



ure should be so little known by the public," he said. "The name of IUCN should be at least as familiar as that of Volkswagen." He reported that he had secured the support of BBD, the world's largest advertising agency, to help launch an international awareness campaign in favour of IUCN's goals to foster sustainable development.

The Fontainebleau Challenge

During the event, some 300 IUCN members participated in twelve symposia, the results of which led to the "Appel de Fontainebleau," which concluded the celebrations. It notes that the life support systems upon which humanity depends are threatened from all sides, and states, *inter alia*,

"In the face of these realities, we have imagined tomorrow's world. It is a world that celebrates and nurtures the essential diversity of life, of cultures and peoples. It is a world in which we will embrace a new environmental ethic that recognises that without nature there is no happiness, no tranquillity, no quality of life. We seek harmony in nature and unity among peoples, for without these, life on earth is not sustainable."

The paper calls on governments and intergovernmental organisations to move beyond short-termism; and calls upon governments to pay greater attention to the role environmental issues play in larger questions of economic development and international conflicts. □

Note

* President Chirac is, in fact, asking for an international Covenant. However, such a instrument is already in place, and has been applauded from many sides. It incorporates all the principles from the Stockholm and Rio Conferences and the new treaties.

The "International Covenant on Environment and Development," was drafted by IUCN's Commission on Environmental Law (CEL), in cooperation with the International Council of Environmental Law (ICEL) and with the assistance of UNEP's Environmental Law and Institutions Programme Activity Centre (ELI/PAC). It was presented at the UN Conference on Public International Law in 1994, in New York (see *Environmental Policy and Law*, Vol. 24) and will be updated again. Some States approve it as it stands. Others find it too progressive.

A copy of the Covenant is available from the IUCN Environmental Law Centre, Godesberger Allee 108-110, 53175 Bonn, Germany.