

Address by IUCN Director-General Julia Marton-Lefèvre at the Opening Session of the World Conservation Forum

7 September 2012, Jeju, Republic of Korea

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends and Colleagues

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the opening of the World Conservation Forum. Our Congress, I remind you, takes the slogan of **Nature+**.

I am sure you are familiar with the notion of “plus” in mathematics, where it stands for the operation of addition, or simply refers to something positive. But how does that apply to the world of conservation?

For many years, we have viewed nature either as something in need of protection or something that defies human control as in the expression “a force of nature”.

But let us be clear. Nature does not deserve our fear nor begs our pity. Nature is neither a victim nor is it an offender; nature is part of the solution.

Indeed, while our Union will always continue to vigorously defend threats to natural ecosystems and the species that depend on them, including us, humans, we now go a long way beyond the usual calls for protection, risk reduction and charity.

This is what we at IUCN call *nature-based solutions*.

This concept has crystallized over the last four years to become a major tenet of the draft IUCN Programme for 2013-2016.

Nature+ thus captures the fundamental importance of nature and its inherent link to every aspect of our lives.

Over the next five days at this Forum, we will explore some of the most pressing environmental and development challenges from this perspective.

Today, we will focus on **nature+ climate** — discussing nature-based solutions to climate change;

Tomorrow, we will address the crucial question of whether we can feed the world of 7 billion, going on 9 billion people, sustainably, in the Forum discussions on **nature+ food**;

On Sunday, we'll put the spotlight on **nature+ development** — exploring whether social and economic development can indeed go hand-in-hand with nature conservation;

Then, on Monday, we will look at the key issue of effective and equitable governance of nature's use through our discussions on **nature+ people & governance**;

And finally, the closing day of the Forum will be dedicated to **nature+ life**: valuing and conserving nature, the very foundation of our own wellbeing and, ultimately, survival.

In addition to some 550 Forum events, every evening, starting tonight, we will hold World Leaders Dialogues, which will feature prominent speakers from all walks of life.

Through these discussions, we hope to showcase how strong and resilient nature is intricately linked to solving these global challenges. How it can bring positive results for both people and the planet.

Here, allow me to bring another “plus” into the equation. Our World Conservation Congress is the first major international meeting after the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, or Rio+20 as it is better known.

Many of you, like me, will have been at the Rio+20 Conference. There is a feeling that the outcome of Rio was disappointing. I think actually that Rio+20 produced some vital lessons that should give us hope for more progress.

I saw two things in Rio. I saw governments working hard but struggling to find consensus on what it takes exactly to transform sustainable development from aspiration to reality.

But, I also saw local governments, NGOs and businesses showcasing with optimism and enthusiasm their achievements and innovations that are making a difference on the ground — for conservation, for sustainability and, yes, for a ‘greener’ economy.

Rio+20 was therefore a reaffirmation — that governments should not be expected to make development sustainable by themselves. It takes partnerships — with municipalities, NGOs, farmers, lawyers, parliamentarians, scientists, businesses, and so the list goes on.

This is where IUCN and our World Conservation Congress come in. This is where we start putting Rio commitments into action. After all, this is what the world needs most right now.

We are the largest and most diverse partnership in the service of nature the world has ever seen.

Our Union is our biggest asset. The biggest “plus” on our balance sheet.

And, when we work together, in unison, the whole is most definitely greater than the sum of its parts — not only for IUCN and the global conservation movement it represents, but also for nature and all seven billion of us who depend on it.

Now, wouldn't that be a real plus?

Thank you. I look forward to engaging in the Forum discussions with all of you.