

**World Conservation Congress
Opening Speech
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Ashok Khosla, President, IUCN

President of the Republic of Korea, Mr. Lee Myung-Bak, Governor of Jeju Special Self-Governing Province, Mr. Woo Keun-Min, Honorable Ministers, Your Excellencies, Members of IUCN and its Commissions, Members of the IUCN Secretariat, Esteemed Colleagues and Friends.

Welcome to IUCN's 2012 Congress. This is the 23rd such assembly since our Union was born 64 years ago. Once every four years, the Union convenes policy makers, experts and practitioners from all over the globe to share knowledge and concerns about the health of our natural world – the species, the habitats and the ecosystems that share the planet with us and, indeed, sustain all of us – and each other.

It is a wonderful opportunity for all of us to meet here in Korea, in a country, which is an outstanding demonstration of the possibilities for bringing about rapid improvement in the lives of a nation's citizens, while also making major commitments to regenerating its natural resource base so that the well-being of its people may be assured for future generations.

And, of course, it is an extraordinary occasion for us to be in this beautiful island of Jeju, home to world-renowned natural beauty and cultural traditions that are the very resources that our Union seeks to protect and nurture – where every day one is reminded of the infinite opportunities our world offers us for a better life as well as the planetary boundaries within which we must create these opportunities.

IUCN's vision statement expresses this as: "A just world that values and conserves nature."

IUCN is a remarkable institution. It not only has a brain but also arms and legs – and a heart. Its advice is respected by world leaders and conservation practitioners alike, because it is based on field evidence, operational experience, rigorous analysis and a highly active conscience. IUCN understands that for nature to be properly cared for, conservation action must be designed at the global and national level and implemented at the regional and local levels within the larger context of sustainable development.

For conservation to be successful, we must address not just the imperatives of the natural environment, but also of the economic, social and political environments. Conservation policies and action cannot succeed for long unless nations and communities use their resources efficiently, distribute the benefits equitably and empower their citizens actively and inclusively. This requires high levels of responsibility in governance – with firm commitment to social justice through

transparent processes and the participation of all those in making decisions that affect them.

Having said that, and always keeping in mind the broader perspectives of sustainable development, Conservation of Biological diversity is, and must remain, the heartland of our Union's mandate and work.

The outputs of our Commissions, all of which are geared to generating solutions that work, whether in our forests or deserts, in our cities or industries, or in our parliaments or courts, have been highly successful in showing the way to a future that is supported by much greater harmony between humankind and nature.

Mr. President, I believe that the nature of ethics we need to evolve must now emerge from the ethics of nature, derived from the imperatives of ecological survival and universal human wellbeing. The new ethic needed for a more sustainable development can only come about when we look further down the road at the impacts of our policies and actions. This means that we have now to lengthen our time horizons, widen our spheres of concern, and greatly expand our attention to the lives and livelihoods of those far away or those not yet born. And above all we have to regain humanity's basic reverence for life. Both at the individual and societal level.

Such a millennial transformation in mindsets can happen only through a redefinition of self-interest, and by nurturing an ethic of caring – a process that needs the strongest leadership from those who run our governments, businesses, NGOs, schools and universities, faith organizations and media. Recognizing, building up and supporting such leaders is an essential part of the purpose of the work of IUCN and of our Congress here.

Despite a major global recession through the entire period, our Union, together with our partners, has been able to continue to contribute remarkably to the world's conservation efforts. The Union has played a major role in many of the large global summits and conferences.

We can be proud, also of the results of the hundreds of projects that we manage on the ground, all over the world. And the President and Council who have guided the Union over these four years will hand over the torch of governance to their democratically elected successors at this Congress.

Substantively, the Congress theme is Nature+, a simple and memorable slogan that captures the fundamental importance of nature and its inherent link to every aspect of our lives. The mathematics of a large number of pluses means that Nature is, in fact, a multiplier – a creator of things of enormous value out of almost nothing, something that we humans must learn from if we are to take advantage of nature's enormous potentials and yet live within its limits. Under the massive pressure from human activity, Nature often appears to be fragile and losing the battle.

Yet, we also know that Nature is inherently strong. Even the most delicate looking plant, animal or ecosystem is relatively tough, its survival instincts honed over generations of evolution.

Nature+ is about boosting the resilience of nature – improving how quickly nature and people adapt to change. Better use of the inherent robustness of nature leads to healthier natural systems, better results from ecosystem and biodiversity restoration, and healthier people, communities and economies. These are the kinds of lessons we will be sharing at this Congress and taking away with us when it ends.

I take this opportunity to give thanks to all of those who made this Congress possible: The Government of the Republic of Korea, The Jeju Special Self Governing Province, our Congress Partners: Samsung Electronics, KT, Hyundai-Kia Motor Company, and The World Business Council on Sustainable Development and its Consortium Members: Hitachi, Holcim, Mondi, Shell, Syngenta, and Valé.

No Congress of this magnitude would happen without such partnerships, and behind me you can see the list of all those who have generously supported the Congress for which we are tremendously grateful.

Allow me to say a few words of appreciation about His Excellency President Lee Myung-bak. Back in 2007, when President Lee was still Mayor of Seoul, he was named Hero of the Environment by TIME Magazine. Since then, President Lee has actively pursued this vision of living in harmony with nature.

On the occasion of the Republic of Korea's 60th anniversary in 2008, he declared "Low Carbon, Green Growth" as the core of the new national vision. I have little doubt that the overarching commitment to putting the environment first, as expressed by President Lee, will be a guiding light in this quest.

On behalf of IUCN, I wish to recognize President Lee's leadership in strengthening the role of environment in his nation's development efforts and thank him for embracing the IUCN vision of "a just world that values and conserves nature."

Mr. President, in your esteemed presence, it is now my privilege to open this Congress.

Mr. President, I have the honour to invite you to join me on the podium.