

# Day 1: Inaugural Session

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## **Introductory Address**

**Mr. Vishwanath Anand**

**Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests**

**Government of India**

India has a very strong tradition of conservation. The teachings of Lord Buddha and Mahavira and also of Mahatma Gandhi have paved the way for a modern conservation ethos. India treasures many of the tenets in her ancient texts, which exalted conservation of species and ecosystems.

The achievements of the country are many. The government has already drafted **legislation on biodiversity** that is being introduced in Parliament and will soon be ratified. It also has **coastal zone regulations**, and an **inventory and action plan for its mangroves** are being worked out.

India has many biodiversity rich areas and has experimented with involving communities in management. Many of these **Joint Forest Management programmes** have succeeded in different parts of the country. Conscious of the need for conservation and for controlling pollution, the government has followed the **polluter pays principle** from very early on. India also has a very active pollution control programme and a well-planned structure for its Pollution Control Boards – both federal and state.

There is a great **need for sustainability** in all these activities and, as with other developing countries, financial resources have always been a crucial issue. However, India has the right culture and social fabric that can be strengthened to enhance the capacity of both the country and the region.

## **Welcome Address**

**Dr. Maritta Koch-Weser**

**Director General, IUCN**

The Government of India, especially the Ministry of Environment and Forests, has extended generous support in organising this grand event. Also, the IUCN India National Committee and other Indian IUCN member organisations have provided remarkable assistance in making this Second Regional Forum possible. The last time IUCN had such a major event in India was in 1969 for the Tenth General Assembly.

This forum's goal is to highlight the mistakes and misgivings of the past to ensure that history is not repeated. The IUCN **Regional Office for Asia** has seven country offices with 11 States, 20 government agencies, 90 NGOs as members and a few affiliates, and 1,349 Commission members. However, there is a growing need for expansion of the IUCN operation and involvement in Asia. No region is of more importance now than Asia, if not for any other reason than Asia being home to some two-thirds of the total human population. This gathering is significant as it brings together people who can make a difference. It also sets a milestone as China and Northeast Asia are participating in an IUCN forum as part of Asia for the first time ever. This will serve to encourage IUCN to **strengthen its work in China and Northeast Asia**, which began in 1994.

The deliberations in this meeting will be carried over to the World Conservation Congress to be held in October 2000 in Amman, Jordan. IUCN along with its members will be discussing the vision and strategy for the next ten years at the Congress. It is time to think in the long-term. This is the beginning of a new millennium, and it is time to **revisit our collective vision, mission and strategy** towards sustainable environmental development. It is important to focus on systems connected by nature, beyond national boundaries, for sustainable development. Only from this will spring a **collective obligation for conservation**. For instance, a river basin is a part of nature, and members from all sides of its borders — governments, NGOs and others — should come together to conserve it. IUCN could provide an ideal platform for the resolution of such issues.

The resolutions brought forward in the last World Conservation Congress were constructive and decisive. Efforts were made to **act upon the recommendations** and to make them an integral part of IUCN programmes. This regional forum, however, provides an **opportunity to think in a regional context** and to design resolutions in an action-oriented manner. These resolutions would then be appropriately incorporated in IUCN programmes.

The World Conservation Congress in Amman will also provide the opportunity to focus on the initiation of dialogues with the private sector including those who may not wear the badge of being 'environmentalists' but may take decisions that make a difference to environmental conservation. Hopefully, this will be the beginning of a healthy and growing process. Even at the recently held World Water Forum in Hague, the Netherlands, there was a panel discussion for Chief Executive Officers of companies, and many interested organisations had sent their representatives to participate.

The **precepts of IUCN** are to strive for a 'just' world which values and conserves nature. This includes **equity and social factors**. Ethical values and values of appreciation are things that cannot be quantified; yet, there are areas, such as the damage caused to river basins from siltation due to dams, that can be quantified. There is a need to assess the probable and possible changes in the next 5-10 years. There is also an urgent need to assess which species will be threatened and the projected rate of extinction of species over this period. This will enable us to better prepare ourselves, and if we cannot reverse the process, we can at least slow it down. Species cannot be isolated from their ecosystems, and hence the **integrity of an ecosystem needs to be maintained** and improved for the better protection of species. The bottom line, therefore, is to **develop a network** that pays appropriate attention to all factors involved in conserving nature.

One of the primary duties of IUCN is to **strengthen and promote its members' capabilities** and to provide services to them to facilitate their efforts at conserving nature. On the other hand, keeping the network alive and providing access to it are among the primary duties of the IUCN Secretariat. Dissemination of knowledge, scientific and policy-level know-how, as well as bringing the members together are also essential parts of the Secretariat's working agenda. As a forum, IUCN is unique; there is no other institution like it since it has both governmental and non-governmental organisations and agencies as its members. Hence, IUCN is an ideal and neutral platform for both sides to meet and, through IUCN mediation, reduce their differences and reach a consensus whenever possible. A number of contentious issues, including trade and environment, water, genetically modified organisms, and transboundary disputes, are increasingly coming to the forefront, and IUCN can provide a forum that could **facilitate the constructive sharing of views** at both the formal and the informal level.

Even if deserts and mountains are left aside, Asia contains a staggeringly diverse number of ecosystems whose integrity needs to be conserved. The vital element is **appropriate and immediate stewardship** in conserving these ecosystems.

Unfortunately, the poor are the most indiscriminately and adversely affected due to the marginalisation of land and its degradation, pollution, etc. Asia also experiences more **recurring natural calamities** than anywhere else in the world. Though not all of them can be adequately addressed, efforts must be made to control the damage caused by such calamities. For instance, better watershed management can minimise damage caused by recurring floods while conserving wetlands would allow them to act as sponges to absorb the extra water carried in by floods.

Despite all these problems, one should not bypass Asia's enormous potential and its outstanding natural beauty. Over the next few days the focus will be on working at the regional, country and conceptual levels. The directions and destinations have to be set for the next few years. There are **seven key result areas** that IUCN would like to work on in the next few years:

- Ecosystem management
- Implementation of Conventions
- Positive initiatives
- Finance mechanisms
- Wiping out perverse subsidies
- Cost and benefit sharing
- Keeping the network alive

Positive initiatives need to be pushed forward and the IUCN should work with commitment on wiping out **perverse subsidies** that adversely affect the environment. Globally, US\$220 million per year is being spent on servicing subsidies, money that could be used for developing degraded areas. The IUCN must **identify the drivers of degradation** to achieve any sort of change.

### **Address**

**Ms. Akiko Domoto**

**Vice-President, IUCN**

At Fontainebleau on the occasion of IUCN's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, President Jacques Chirac said that the IUCN is **an organisation ahead of its time**. Fifty years ago, no one could have envisaged such a unique organisation made up of NGOs, governments, agencies and scholars all working together to conserve nature. Academia, state agencies, and NGOs were all dissociated until the foundation of IUCN. The activities of all of us, as members, throughout the world in our individual countries and communities, reflect IUCN's important and continuing role as a leading organisation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

One of the most remarkable acknowledgements of the services and roles played by IUCN has been the awarding of **UN Observer Status** this year. IUCN is the first conservation organisation of its kind to ever receive this honour. And it is also an opportunity like never before to fully engage in global environmental governance.

"A just world that protects and conserves nature" is IUCN's **renewed vision**. The Amman World Conservation Congress will be the perfect opportunity to promote and implement this new vision. The Congress can be the vehicle for **global environmental governance**. To make this 'just world' a reality, IUCN will need to be the lead

organisation in creating a more integrative approach to the protection and conservation of nature.

In the 'unjust' world with the overbearing effects of trade on the environment, new developments such as genetic engineering and GMOs are threatening biosafety. The conflict between conservation and trade needs to be resolved through an approach of **cooperative coexistence**.

A healthy and sustainable environment cannot be achieved without ensuring **equitable sharing of benefits and poverty alleviation**. Moreover, **gender issues** needs to be brought to the forefront considering their **explicit and implicit linkages with poverty alleviation options**.

All of these issues and concerns over injustice call for a more holistic and synergetic approach to global environmental governance. In this context, IUCN's role is to bring policy-makers and scholars, NGO members and ministers, scientists and economists together in order to create and implement effective global environmental governance and to realise a truly 'just' world.

### **Special Address**

**Mr. Babu Lal Marandi**

**Honourable State Minister for Environment & Forests**

**Government of India**

Since its inception in 1948, IUCN has been involved in **providing leadership and promoting a common approach** for the conservation of natural resources and for ensuring that human use of natural resources is appropriate, sustainable and equitable. IUCN's success lies in bringing governments, activists and experts together to a common forum and finding solutions that are globally acceptable. Moreover, one of the most encouraging features of IUCN is that it advocates the **use of indigenous knowledge and wisdom** in achieving its mission.

Effective implementation of global biodiversity conservation depends on the goodwill of the nations and parties to the conventions. Therefore, nations will have to design strategies to convince local people about the **role of biodiversity in their economic development and the general welfare** of the society. The nations of Southeast Asia are very privileged in this regard because the **ethos of conservation** is deeply ingrained in the religions and philosophies of this region. The common man here realises that he has to take natural resources in all humility and submissiveness.

However, as we have progressed and acquired technical skills, this humility towards nature has, unfortunately, turned into arrogance, and the destruction of forests and wilderness is thoughtlessly carried out in the name of development. Large scale mining, conversion of natural forests for the monoculturing of fast growing timber species, implementation of large irrigation projects and other development projects are not only adversely affecting the status of wild fauna and flora but also depriving the indigenous societies of the natural resources that are so crucial for their sustenance. Strategies need to be developed for **greater awareness on environment** for the masses.

South Asian countries have to invest heavily on education, health, and social welfare. However, despite financial stringency, India has made **significant investment for wildlife conservation**. During the VII<sup>th</sup>, VIII<sup>th</sup> and IX<sup>th</sup> Plans, total investment in the wildlife sector was around Rs.460 million, Rs. 2000 million and Rs. 6000 million respectively. However, these amounts were not adequate to meet infrastructure costs for protection of 500 plus National Parks and Sanctuaries in India and also to mitigate the

problems of human-animal conflicts. Hence, the international community needs to come in and participate in a more extensive way to support the Protected Areas of significant biodiversity values.

### **Inaugural Address**

**Mr. T.R. Baalu**

**Honourable Union Minister for Environment & Forests  
Government of India**

In the inaugural address at the Tenth General Assembly of IUCN held in Delhi in 1969, the then Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, said, "As one looks around the universe, one marvels at the order and the balance. How beautifully everything fits in! How remarkably well organised everything is... One should have thought that, with this knowledge at his command, man would have learned to live in peace with himself and with nature."

India is one of the **twelve mega-biodiversity reserve countries of the world**, and about 75,000 species of animals and 45,000 species of plants are found here. Of these, approximately 900 plant and 600 animal species are now endangered.

However, in line with IUCN guidelines, a network of **532 protected areas** representing all the diverse ecosystems of the country has so far been created over an area of 15 million hectares in India. Realising the need to integrate the local communities in nature conservation, initiatives such as the **joint forest management system, eco-development committee**, etc. have been undertaken around the national parks and sanctuaries. Also, to halt the diversion of forestlands for non-forestry purposes, the Government of India enacted the **Forest (Conservation) Act** in 1980. After enactment of the Act, diversion of forestlands for various purposes has decreased from 1.50 lakh hectares to approximately 0.20 lakh hectares per year.

**Environmental management** is now accepted in India as a major guiding factor for national development. The process of integrating environmental considerations into development activities is promoted through a system of "**Environment Impact Assessments**" before projects are cleared. India has a very **active NGO movement** in the field of conservation and environment. More than 850 environmental NGOs are currently active throughout the country in promoting the cause of conservation.

With a high population density and a fast changing pattern of lifestyle, it is often difficult to **strike the proper balance** between the needs of short-term development and long-term welfare of mankind through the sustainable management of biological resources. A substantial amount of research is required to **quantify the opportunity costs** from diverting of biological resources for development projects.

Local communities have taken an active interest in ensuring the security of wildlife habitats in the past. The major contributing factor to their active involvement was the **increasing disappearance of buffer zones** between forest areas and agricultural lands. The disappearance of buffer zones forced wild animals to creep into neighbouring human settlements creating disharmony between wildlife and human communities. To ensure active participation of local people, we need to introduce innovative strategies to **recreate bio-zones**, which may act as buffers. One of the ways may be the creation of protected areas with justified controls on the activities of the local communities and simultaneously providing effective protection measures for wildlife.

Another threat to wildlife conservation efforts is the existence of the **global market for wildlife products**. Beside legal measures, there is a need to generate effective

information, education and communication strategies to dissuade potential buyers of wildlife products. There is also a need to focus on **increasing research work** to provide **suitable substitutes** to win over consumers.

IUCN, with its specialist groups and various commissions, will contribute significantly towards achieving these goals and providing solutions to the related problems.

### **Vote of Thanks**

**Dr. S.K. Mukherjee**

**Director, Wildlife Institute of India**

The Second Regional Conservation Forum has been organised in New Delhi fulfilling the commitment made in Kota Kinabalu. The Government of India must be complimented for accepting to host this regional consultative meeting. In this regard, special thanks must be registered for the continuous support and guidance extended by the Honourable Union Minister Mr. T.R. Baalu with the Environment and Forests Ministry portfolio and the Honourable State Minister Mr. Babu Lal Marandi, Ministry of Environment and Forests. Mr. Vishwanath Anand, Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests, and the Chairperson of the Indian National Committee of IUCN, has been a "constant source of help and guidance" in making this conference possible and should also be lauded.

Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, ex-President of the Indian National Committee of IUCN, deserves to be extolled for accepting the request to deliver the **keynote address** for the occasion. It must be our collective hope that the approach of "**conservation without borders**" suggested in her opening speech by Dr. Maritta Koch-Wesser, Director General, IUCN, would be the driving mantra for all those present to keep the network active and alive.

The representatives of various embassies and high commissions and international donor agencies of the region warrant appreciation for coming and participating in this conference showing their **common commitment and concerns**. Similarly, all the participants and delegates attending from different countries of the region as well as the members of IUCN in India must be acknowledged for their effort.

Ms. Aban Marker Kabraji and Dr. Zakir Hussain who have worked very hard to make this event possible and successful deserve special thanks. Colleagues from different organisations and members of IUCN in India should be applauded for their help and guidance through all the preparatory stages.

Thanks should also be registered for Mr. S.C. Sharma, Addl. IGF (WL), Dr. Anmol Kumar DIG (WL), Mr. Kartikeya Sarabhai, Mr. Ashish Banerjee, Mr. Avinash Datta, Mr. B.C. Choudhury and Mr. Praveen Singh for their hard work to make this programme a success. There are also a large number of individuals from WWF-India, INTACH, Development Alternatives, WII, CEE and Ministry of External Affairs who had worked very hard along with others.