

IUCN World Conservation Congress Highlights: Saturday, 4 September 2021

The second day of the IUCN World Conservation Congress was dominated by the Forum, which includes more than 600 sessions on the economic, social, scientific, and technical aspects of issues covering the thematic areas of the Congress.

Highlights of the day included:

- The Forum opening session, where high-level participants stressed the need and opportunity to achieve transformational change;
- The parallel opening of seven plenaries, addressing the Congress themes; and
- An interactive session discussing applications of synthetic biology relevant to biodiversity conservation, with different opinions tabled, which could spill over into discussions on the relevant motion during the Assembly.

Forum Opening

The Forum opening set the overall agenda for discussions across the seven Congress themes. Jayathma Wickramanayake, UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, moderated the session, organizing the discussion around opportunities and ways to achieve them.

IUCN Director General Bruno Oberle noted that the pandemic has revealed our interrelation with nature, which is “our biggest infrastructure.” Stressing that climate change is visible to everyone while biodiversity “is fading away more silently,” he emphasized our existence is at stake if urgent action is not taken. He further underscored that recovery packages must not harm nature and climate, and that a reasonable percentage should be invested towards rebuilding natural capital.

Barbara Pompili, Minister of the Ecological Transition, France, underscored there will be no development unless it relates to ecological transition. She called for decarbonization, stressing this transition is not about restrictions, but about drivers and opportunities. She expanded on specific actions

governments must take, such as retrofitting buildings, changing public procurement, and environmental impact advertising.

Frans Timmermans, European Commission, noted that humanity has an incredible opportunity for a fundamental reset, cautioning that if the transition is not successful, future generations “will be fighting wars over water and food.” He said markets cannot solve everything, calling for reinventing regulation.

Ana María Hernández Salgar, Chair, Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), called for institutional bridges among medical, veterinary, and conservation communities to reduce the risk of future pandemics. She reiterated the linkages among biodiversity, climate change, and health, calling for mainstreaming biodiversity considerations in all sectors.

Christine Lagarde, President, European Central Bank, emphasized the need to eliminate fossil fuel subsidies and set a carbon price, and highlighted three drivers that prompt central banks to incorporate climate into monetary policy: prioritization of science; activism, especially from youth; and accountability mechanisms.

Nisreen Elsaim, UN Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change, underscored knowledge dissemination as the first step in developing the solidarity necessary to address the environmental crisis. She highlighted the need for bold action from all regions, especially from major polluters.

Yannick Glemarec, Executive Director, Green Climate Fund (GCF), agreed that greening the economic recovery is essential and emphasized that developing countries need access to green finance, with up to USD 4 trillion required to be shifted away from unsustainable activities.

Thematic Plenaries

Rights and Governance: The opening plenary, moderated by Valérie Dekimpe, Broadcast Journalist, featured a multicultural panel, which exchanged views on the close interconnection among rights, equitable resource governance, and nature conservation.



IUCN Director General **Bruno Oberle**



Barbara Pompili, Minister of the Ecological Transition, France



Carlos Manuel Rodriguez, CEO and Chairperson, GEF



Loïc Fauchon, President, World Water Council

Carlos Manuel Rodriguez, CEO and Chairperson, Global Environment Facility (GEF), stressed the need to: fully recognize Indigenous Peoples as political actors; invest heavily in good governance at the national level; and address institutional failures. José Gregorio Díaz Mirabal, Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon River Basin, highlighted the motion to protect 80% of the Amazon by 2025, encouraging respect for Indigenous Peoples' political and territorial rights. Focusing on the role of women as custodians of biodiversity, Cécile Ndjebet, the African Women's Network for Community Management of Forests, emphasized gender responsiveness and inclusiveness, and tenure security.

David Boyd, UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, underscored that human rights must be placed at the heart of all conservation actions, emphasizing that the existing economic model "wages war on nature." Melinda Janki, Justice Institute Guyana, described efforts to fight against offshore oil drilling in Guyana, stressing that rights must be legally protected to be properly respected. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Tebtebba Foundation, emphasized that indigenous governance is efficient and Indigenous Peoples' rights are key for a sustainable future.

Climate Change: IUCN Deputy Director General Grethel Aguilar moderated the session. Barbara Pompili, Minister of the Ecological Transition, France, said "nature is a climate ally, not a passive receptacle of policies."

On COP 26, Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, called for mobilizing biodiversity-neutral or -positive investment for climate action. Laurent Fabius, COP 21 President, said COP 26 must implement and strengthen, not reinvent, the Paris Agreement. Nigel Topping, UN High Level Climate Action Champion, UK, urged turning ambition into action that is informed by science.

On national efforts, Nancy Tembo, Minister of Forestry and Natural Resources, Malawi, outlined initiatives to ensure communities lead on forest regeneration. Patricia Danzi, Director-General, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, emphasized engagement with the finance sector to conserve nature.

Non-state actors Mina Setra, the Archipelago Indigenous Peoples' Alliance, called for combining nature and community-based solutions, and Harry Brekelmans, Royal Dutch Shell, presented the company's four-pillar corporate strategy of: financial viability; respecting nature; powering lives; and net-zero emissions by 2050.

Economic and financial systems: Marianne Haahr, Green Digital Finance Alliance, moderated. Bruno Oberle, IUCN, emphasized enormous opportunities, potentially arising from

transforming the industrial sector, which could equal a Marshall Plan times 100.

Lamenting a biosphere stressed beyond imagination, Partha Dasgupta, University of Cambridge, UK, urged companies to disclose risks throughout supply chains to enable consumers to make informed decisions.

Two panel discussions followed. The first focused on nature-based economic recovery. It comprised Elliott Harris, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs; Jennifer Morris, The Nature Conservancy; Magali Anderson, Holcim; Antoine Sire, BNP Paribas; and Yannick Glemarec, Green Climate Fund (GCF). Discussions included: matching nature-positive private investments with public funding; debt-for-nature swaps; improved ecosystem services accounting; and nature-based lending criteria.

The second panel tackled triggers for action and included speakers: Baomiaivotse Vahinala Raharinirina, Minister for Environment and Sustainable Development, Madagascar; Kevin Urama, African Development Institute; Preston Hardison, Tebtebba Foundation; Raffaello Cervigni, World Bank; and Robyn Seetal, IkTaar Sustainability. Discussions centered on: stress-testing balance sheets, integrating nature into lending criteria, finance-for-nature, and involving youth and Indigenous Peoples in decision making.

Freshwater: The session was moderated by Paul Logan, Marine Biologist. Opening the session, Loïc Fauchon, President, World Water Council, observed that water is at the center of nature-based solutions, although it is often not prioritized as such.

Bérangère Abba, Secretary of State for Biodiversity, France, highlighted national efforts to restore and purify water resources, including master plans for water development and management.

Elizabeth Mrema, Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), highlighted threats to fresh water, noting that management of water systems has focused on water provision for domestic use without ensuring the integrity of water functions.

Martha Rojas Urrego, Secretary-General, Ramsar Convention, described wetlands as the most effective carbon sink, critical for water purification and recharge, as well as for other development objectives.

Panel discussions additionally highlighted: water as a "hidden habitat," with its own unique fauna and flora; the need to rethink water use and adopt emerging technologies; the GCF's strategy to conserve and reuse water using innovative financing mechanisms; actions to integrate water management and ecosystem protection; support from the Netherlands for water basin management; and the role of young people in protecting freshwater biodiversity.



Olga Atsynga Letykai Csonka, Ethnologist

Oceans: Jessica Nabongo, CEO, The Catch Me if You Can, opened the session. Peter Thomson, UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, highlighted the ocean's role in human security and encouraged all to support the UN decade of ocean science for sustainable development. Multiple speakers presented initiatives, including: France's zero plastic leakage to the sea by 2030, governance on the high seas, and Antarctic ocean conservation.

During the science-centric panel, speakers presented new tools: the Global Fishing Index and Marine Manager, which will assess fish stocks globally and track fishing activities via satellite, respectively. Panelists emphasized that better, more accessible data is needed to move fisheries in a sustainable direction. They added that local knowledge from all practitioners must be included in these tools and assessments, as well as more innovative financing to promote sustainable fisheries management, for example through grants, blended finance mechanisms, and increased risk disclosure.

Landscapes: Anna Jones, Journalist, moderated the session. Harvey Locke, Chair, IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) Beyond the Aichi Targets Task Force, called for linking action under the climate and biodiversity agendas, and urged all UN conventions to adopt a top-level goal of achieving an equitable, nature-positive, carbon-neutral world. Cristelle Pratt, Organisation of African, Caribbean, and Pacific States, called for: rebalancing economic growth strategies; adopting a holistic approach to food systems; and ensuring implementation of environmental commitments.

Josefa Tauli, Global Youth Biodiversity Network, said biological and cultural diversity are too often viewed as in opposition, but in reality they enhance each other, as Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities have been storing and safeguarding biodiversity for millennia. Christiane Laibach, KfW Development Bank, called for more private sector financing to address ecosystem degradation, and ensuring this financing reaches the developing world. Achim Steiner, Administrator, UN Development Programme (UNDP), said conservation and human growth can be achieved, and that land use is a good indicator of an economy's ability to bring people and nature together.

Knowledge, Innovation, and Technology: Penelope Smart, IUCN, opened the session. Jean-Michel Blanquer, Minister of Education, France, stressed the importance of knowledge for continued advances in conservation. Smart said standards must be applicable over time and relatable between places and standards.

Craig Hilton-Taylor, IUCN, and Emily Nicholson, Deakin University, presented the IUCN Red List and the IUCN Red List of Ecosystems, respectively.

Andy Plumptre, BirdLife International, explained that the Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) designation addressed the need for a unifying framework to investigate sites of importance to biodiversity. Lauren Weatherdon, UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre, spoke on the Protected Planet initiative, which is an aggregation of local and national databases on terrestrial and marine protected areas. Edward Ellis, Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool (IBAT), provided an overview of the IBAT and its application.

Shaikha Salem Al Dhaheri, Secretary General, Environment Agency-Abu Dhabi, said there are many opportunities and challenges for using IUCN data and knowledge tools. Olivier Langrand, Executive Director, Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, noted the importance of using the available data and tools to ensure impactful funding. Stuart Butchart, BirdLife International, said indicators are essential for monitoring progress in implementation. Seynabou Ba, Founder and CEO, ESG Africa, spoke on the use of biodiversity and conservation knowledge products in the private sector.

Update to the IUCN Red List

Bruno Oberle said the newest assessment brings hope, using as an example evidence showing that some tuna populations are slowly recovering.

Penelope Smart, IUCN, said nature is in trouble, emphasizing the need for good intelligence and information based on sound science to address the problem, which is the purpose of the IUCN Red List. Beth Polidoro, Arizona State University, said the decline in the loss of tuna shows that sustainable fishing is possible.

Questions from the audience addressed: criteria used for assessments; an increase in the sharks and rays listed as threatened; and the listing of over 4,000 new species, including trees and fungi.

Spirituality and Nature Dialogue: responsibility, inspiration, and behavior change

This session was moderated by Gethel Aguilar, IUCN Deputy Director General. Cardinal Peter Turkson, First Prefect, Vatican, said humanity has gone wrong in trying to control and dominate the Earth, rather than conserving and protecting it to ensure it can continue to support human life. Olga Letykai-Csonka, Ethnologist, said all nature is animated and alive, and stressed the need to live spiritually in harmony with nature. Noting the majority of the world's population is spiritual or religious, Thomas Schirmacher, Secretary General and CEO, World Evangelical Alliance, said the required societal change needs spiritual and religious backing, promoting the understanding that protecting nature is part of faith.

Matthieu Ricard, Founder, Karuna Shechen, said everything is interconnected, and humanity must work towards increased social justice and sustainable harmony with nature. Fazlun Khalid, Founder, Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences, lamented that humans have turned the Earth from a source to be nurtured to a resource to be exploited. He said society must delink from consumerism, away from a growth agenda that raids the Earth of its natural resources. Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati, Parmarth Niketan, India, stated society needs to recognize oneness instead of separation, to shift from "I to We, from illness to wellness." Multiple speakers pointed to the golden rule of treating one's neighbor as oneself as essential to conservation.

Cardinal Turkson closed the session, reflecting on the need to shift from a dominion to compassion mindset. He reminded the audience that it is essential to respect the dignity of nature and work together to take care of our common home.

Genetic Frontiers for Conservation

This session, facilitated by Julie Shapiro, Keystone Policy Center, focused on synthetic biology. In 2016, IUCN's Members requested an assessment on applications of synthetic biology, relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Many members of the IUCN Task Force on Synthetic Biology and Biodiversity Conservation participated in this session.

Kent Redford, Archipelago Consulting, introduced the context of the Genetic Frontiers for Conservation assessment. He said this issue affects two distinct groups of people deeply: those who cannot imagine that more technology can help nature, as nature is already severely impacted by technology; and those who find hope in potential new tools. Lydia Slobodian, Georgetown University, presented highlights from the assessment's governance chapter, noting challenges associated with defining synthetic biology as either process- or product-based, a lack of clarity on national jurisdictions, and the accessibility of synthetic biology.

Elizabeth Bennett, Wildlife Conservation Society, focused on applications intended for conservation benefit, stressing risks and benefits. On threat mitigation, she highlighted applications of gene drives against invasive species and the potential to produce genetically identical species, combatting wildlife trade. Regarding species' adaptation, she emphasized increasing genetic resilience and tackling disease. Hilde Eggermont, Strategic Coordinator, Belgian Biodiversity Platform, addressed applications not directly intended for conservation benefits. Noting both positive and negative potential consequences, she highlighted applications for pest control; environmental engineering, including bioremediation and biomining; and changing frontiers in synthetic biology.

Dan Tompkins, Predator Free 2050, emphasized important knowledge gaps and the need for increased awareness of potential consequences to better inform future discussions. Regarding unintended consequences, he highlighted potential impacts on non-target species, global equity, and Indigenous Peoples' self-determination. Ann Kingiri, African Centre for Technology Studies, focused on agricultural applications. She highlighted potential benefits, including disease resistance and eradication of invasive species, and underscored knowledge gaps, urging awareness raising.

Aroha Mead, Biological Heritage National Science Challenge, focused on the process of building trust with Indigenous Peoples before discussing technological benefit sharing. Aileen Lee, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, urged conservationists not to sit on the side-lines by opting out of benefit sharing, but to take a proactive approach on synthetic biology. Todd Kuiken, North Carolina State University, highlighted recent CBD activities related to synthetic biology, including the *Ad Hoc* Technical Expert Group.



Kent Redford, Archipelago Consulting

Thomas Brooks, Chief Scientist, IUCN, reflected on how the conservation community should engage with industry or agriculture, where conservation is not a priority. He stressed that the discussion on synthetic biology does not take place against a backdrop of a pristine environment, adding examples where traditional conservation has no documented effective responses.

Discussions ensued, including on: weighing potential risks and benefits; past lessons learned from technological development; prioritizing traditional conservation techniques before applying novel technologies; and whether a governance mechanism could potentially stop synthetic biology applications.

Unlocking a Nature-based Recovery: How to Rebuild After the Pandemic

Keith Tuffley, Citi, moderated the session. Bruno Oberle, IUCN, called for investments that do not worsen the biodiversity crisis and that earmark at least 10% to benefit nature directly. Rémy Rioux, French Development Agency, said training in nature-based solutions can enable financial actors to scale up nature-positive financial resources.

Two panels followed. The first comprised Mari Pangestu, World Bank; Odile Renaud-Basso, President, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development; Yannick Glemarec, Executive Director, GCF; Izabella Teixeira, International Resource Panel; and Achim Steiner, Administrator, UNDP. Discussions to unlock nature-positive development included: an integrated, whole-of-economy approach; and measuring and managing risks to nature through a Task Force for Nature-Related Financial Disclosures. Tuffley concluded that there is no shortage of capital but instead, capital must shift to nature-positive development that generates co-benefits for biodiversity and livelihoods.

The second panel included: Baomiavotse Vahinala Raharinirina, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, Madagascar; Najib Balala, Cabinet Secretary for Tourism, Kenya; Han Jeoung-ae, Minister of Environment, Republic of Korea; Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Tebtebba Foundation; and Patrick Odier, Bank Lombard Odier & Co. Discussions focused on: collaborating with local communities to preserve nature and prioritize the creation of value chains that do not worsen the biodiversity crisis; the need to create jobs, invest in conservation and tourism, and address these sectors' financing needs in the wake of the pandemic; the Republic of Korea's Green New Deal and differentiated strategies to recover from COVID-19; putting human rights at the center of conservation; and how the finance sector can influence consumers to make investments in nature-based solutions.

Press Conference on the World Summit of Indigenous Peoples

The press conference on the outcomes of the IUCN World Summit of Indigenous Peoples and Nature, which took place on 3 September 2021, focused on the adoption of the Global Indigenous Agenda for the Governance of Indigenous Lands, Territories, Waters, Coastal Seas, and Natural Resources. It featured a panel, comprising representatives of the Indigenous Peoples' Organisations (IPO), and underscored the importance of recognizing and including consideration of the Indigenous Agenda when developing policy and implementing conservation measures. They also discussed: Indigenous Peoples and local communities' (IPLCs') adaptive management capacity; ensuring participation of indigenous women and youth; and recognizing IPLCs' right to free, prior, and informed consent.