



3 July 2008

JML Intervention at WH Committee, Quebec

Madam Chairperson

It is a pleasure for me as Director General of IUCN to be here and see how we can help support and complement the great and truly essential work of the World Heritage Committee. UNESCO was instrumental in the creation of IUCN 60 years ago and I am happy to note that we are still working closely and effectively together for the benefit of nature and people.

We all know that our planet's resources are overexploited and that the strains we put on our environment are unsustainable. We should challenge the idea that the only value we give to nature is one we can exploit without considering its regenerative capacity.

In that context, we need protected areas. They demonstrate that healthy ecosystems are essential to life itself, and they show that nature can be very generous when it is allowed to be. And that is a message that we have to keep alive. World Heritage Sites cover some 8% of the total area of protected areas around the world, and if properly managed they represent the flagships of global conservation. In order for this to happen, we need political will, we need instruments, and we need standards.

This is a standard-setting Convention and I am pleased IUCN is able to contribute to upholding those standards, especially through the advice from our World Heritage Panel. IUCN's work on World Heritage exemplifies our

commitment to providing independent, objective and rigorous advice based on the best science and knowledge and the best standards of practice in the field.

IUCN sees the coming items on State of Conservation (7A and 7B) as the heart of the Convention, more so even than the inscription of new sites. I would like to note, as this item opens, three issues that I believe the Committee should focus on when considering the State of Conservation reports.

1. Firstly, the threats to biodiversity in some sites should be of real concern. 120 natural World Heritage Sites are inscribed on the WH List because of the richness of their biodiversity. Many of those sites face major threats from activities such as poaching, habitat loss from deforestation and logging. IUCN's analyses show species extinction rates are increasing. There needs to be a sense of urgency in our response to this, and this should start with our commitment to protecting the values of World Heritage Sites in terms of species conservation..

2. Secondly, it is important to find measures to protect World Heritage Sites that also support livelihoods of people living in and adjacent to these areas, for example through sustainable tourism. Nine of the 13 natural sites on the Danger List suffer from poaching, Strategies for alternative livelihoods are needed to address these threats.. In Simien, Ethiopia such a strategy has been developed but funds are insufficient to implement it. The international community needs to support concrete and feasible projects developed with local communities. When local populations see conservation and their well-being as inextricably linked the battle is almost won.

3. Finally, I am concerned that across 57 natural and mixed World Heritage Sites to be considered, we are reporting 15 sites where mining impacts are a concern. World Heritage Status should mean that some principles are beyond discussion. One of these is the so called "no-go" commitment to mining in World Heritage Sites recognized by the International Council of Metals and by Shell. 'No go' means that no mining and no exploration can take place within

a natural World Heritage site. And that includes the implicit expectation that the values of World Heritage Sites will also not be damaged by adjacent mining. In short, World Heritage Sites should be off-limits for mining. Period.

For this reason, IUCN calls for the 'no-go' principle to be adopted urgently by all private and state companies, and enforced by all signatory governments. IUCN proposes that the principle of "no go" for mining or exploration, and its strict enforcement by governments, should be, in essence, a condition for any new listing. Consequently, the non-respect of this condition should be considered as representing the type of threat that should eventually lead to taking a site off the list.

IUCN agrees wholeheartedly with the comments made at the opening ceremony by the President of UNESCO's General Conference, Mr. Georges Anastassopoulos. In order to maintain the value, respect and prestige of the World Heritage Site label, we have to pay greater attention to the state of sites already listed and be more demanding about the efforts made to maintain them properly.

Thank you Madam Chairperson