

Healthy Ecosystems enhances Resilience to Disasters

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Statement to the first preparatory meeting of the UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, Geneva, 14 and 15 July 2014

Madam. Co-chair, distinguished delegates

- The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is a membership organization founded in 1948. Its members are States, government agencies and non-governmental organizations. Its secretariat is represented in all regions of the world where we undertake projects and initiatives on different areas, including disaster risk reduction.
- Madam co-chair, we are pleased to note that almost all the interventions made by governments and others since yesterday reflect one point of consensus: **the international community must work towards enhancing resilience**. In this context, IUCN wishes to highlight the importance of ecosystems in enhancing resilience.
- Ecosystem conservation, restoration and their sustainable management can play a critical role in people's ability to prevent, cope with, and recover from disasters and, hence, considerably enhance communities' resilience. Ecosystems also provide many livelihood benefits, such as food, firewood, clean water, fibers, and medicines that contribute to the overall resilience of communities to disasters and climate change.
- Some countries have become conscious of this and have taken measures to direct investment in conserving and sustainably managing ecosystems:
 1. A study carried out by IUCN with other partners documented that coastal trees contributed to reducing human deaths and economic loss resulting from the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami in 2011. Consequently, Japan has established a new protected area along the affected coast which will see further

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For more information about IUCN's work on DRR:

Visit IUCN at the Environment
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Or check out our websites
www.iucn.org/ecosystems
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We also encourage you to join
IUCN's Commission on
Ecosystem Management
(CEM)
www.iucn.org/cem
and/or
World Commission on
Protected Areas (WCPA)
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investments in restoring and expanding coastal forests with the aim of better protecting human life and livelihoods.

2. Last year some of the coastal communities that survived typhoon Haiyan reported that the mangrove forests protected their lives and livelihoods from the disaster. Following this, the government of the Philippines has earmarked approximately US\$8m to fund efforts to replant much of the affected coastal zone with mangrove forests.
 3. Similarly, following Katarina Hurricane, large scale wetland restoration is underway to complement flood levees in order to reduce risks from future hazards in that vulnerable area of the United States.
- In spite of these examples of measures taken in developed and developing countries, progress on Priority 4 of the Hyogo Framework of Action on reducing underlying risks which includes ecosystem degradation, is reported to be 'very limited'. How many more losses of lives and how much more economic loss will it take for the international community to finally take collective action towards protecting *key ecosystems to increase resilience*?
 - An ecosystem-based approach is not necessarily complex or even expensive, certainly not in relation to the costs of not addressing the risks once these materialize. Here in Switzerland, for example, the protection and management forests is approximately 5 – 10 times less expensive than the construction and maintenance of alternative technical measures to reduce risks from rock falls. Governments, when building development and DRR planning should consider a combined approach of built and natural infrastructure to enhance resilience to the maximum and reduce costs to the minimum.
 - IUCN is undertaking some projects to implement the ecosystem-approach – Key donor countries are also increasingly understanding the value of nature as a risk reduction measure. With funding from Germany, IUCN is working with countries such as Senegal, Uganda, Chile, Peru, Nepal, China, Thailand to implement ecosystem based solutions for building community resilience to disasters and climate change impacts. In partnership with these national governments IUCN is working with local communities to catalyze such action on the ground.

- IUCN is also following other closely related processes, namely the negotiations on Sustainable Development Goals and climate change. We highlight the importance of ensuring coherence among these and all related processes in order to multiply actions towards a resilient society.
- On the road to Sendai 2015, IUCN wishes to bring to your attention the World Parks Congress to be held in Sydney from 12 to 19 November 2014. This could be a great opportunity for DRR managers to establish links with the conservation community. A key item on the agenda that is being led by the government of Japan is related to understanding the role of protected areas in disaster risk reduction.
- Madam co-chair, IUCN stands ready to contribute to discussions towards a strong post 2015 framework and looks forward to seeing the role of ecosystems well reflected in that framework with the view to building a more resilient society at all levels.

THANK YOU