



Statement by Mr. Xinsheng Zhang, President of the International Union
for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to the High Level Segment of UNFCCC
COP21/CMP 11
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We are left with just three days to conclude what is arguably the most important agreement of our generation.

The challenge we face is overwhelmingly complex, so it stands to reason that an effective response will be at least as complex, implicating everyone, pulling all stops. Every-single-one.

We are down to the wire. We can't afford to miss any opportunity, overlook one helping hand, or undervalue a single ally.

For years, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, IUCN has been championing the role of nature in the fight against climate change, and underscoring nature's contributions to the urgent work that is being done right here.

A powerful ally, nature makes a critical contribution to climate change mitigation.

Take oceans: Healthy oceans absorb over a quarter of our planet's annual carbon dioxide emissions. Or forests: Meeting our global targets on halting deforestation and restoring degraded lands could reduce emissions and sequester carbon equivalent to the yearly emissions of all the cars in the world – that's approximately the total of Russia's annual greenhouse gas emissions.

In addition to helping us meet our mitigation goals, nature is a major source of resilience. Healthy ecosystems help protect us against natural disasters – the hurricanes, floods and droughts that are now occurring more and more frequently as a result of climate change.

But climate change itself weakens nature's ability to help us. And our own destructive actions undermine this potent ally in our fight against climate change. Let us recall that Winston Churchill once said "There is only one thing worse than fighting with allies, and that is fighting without them".

Ladies and gentlemen, too often, we do both.

This is why IUCN is calling for an agreement that recognises the role of nature in reducing carbon emissions and helping nations adapt to a changing climate. We can only achieve our climate goals if the strategies we employ are comprehensive.

Let me finish with this image: in the two minutes that have elapsed since I started speaking, our coastal wetlands alone – these are our seagrasses, mangrove forests, salt marshes – these coastal wetlands have absorbed more than 1,300 tonnes of carbon, also referred to as blue carbon. That's equivalent to the amount of carbon produced by an average car driving around the entire planet 130 times! In two minutes!

The evidence is clear; any climate agreement must recognise nature's contributions to climate action. We can't afford not to make nature part of the solution to climate change.

Thank you.