



UNFCCC COP13, 3-14 December 2007 Bali, Indonesia

Statement by Mr Anada Tiega, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

Mr. President,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

As Secretary General of the Convention on Wetlands, I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to convey the message of the Ramsar Convention to the UNFCCC COP13.

Mr President, it is becoming increasingly clear that much of the impact of our changing and increasingly extreme climate on our future world will be felt through water – in some cases too much in the wrong time and place; elsewhere too little or none where we need it. This is already leading to increasing frequency of natural disasters – notably floods and droughts and fires – in both the developing and developed world, and often affecting the poorest and most vulnerable people and communities.

By definition, without water we do not have any wetlands, nor the many and very valuable services they provide to people. But regrettably less well recognized is the crucial role wetlands also play in the global water cycle, through holding and processing our water – almost all the water we use comes directly or indirectly from wetlands. So without wetlands we will not have the water we need, where and when we need it. Maintaining, managing and restoring our wetlands is thus a crucial component of any successful response to climate mitigation and adaptation.

The Convention on Wetlands, commonly referred to as the Ramsar Convention, is the only global environmental agreement specifically addressing water and ecosystems. The Convention's origins lie in nations' recognition in 1971 that the continuing destruction and degradation of the world's wetlands was one of the most severe and devastating impacts to the world's environment and that it was being caused by humankind's landscape modifications. Now, almost four decades later, there are 157 Contracting Parties - 157 nations that have recognized the importance of coming together and agreeing to implement conservation and wise use principles and practices to protect and preserve their wetlands.

Yet whilst wetlands are – according to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) –amongst the most valuable ecosystems in terms of the benefits they provide to people, they are also still the most rapidly degrading ecosystems in the world. In our national and international decision-making we are clearly not yet paying sufficient attention to the role and importance of wetlands, both inland and coastal, when we take decisions for other purposes, including climate adaptation, that lead to the loss of the valuable water-related and other ecosystem services they provide. Such wetlands include high mountain and riverine wetlands that are crucial for water retention, flood and drought mitigation and water supply for over one billion people; and coastal wetlands such as mangroves, invaluable for the resilience of vulnerable coastal communities to sea level rise and storm surges.

In relation to their ecosystem services and tremendous productivity most of the world's people, and especially the most vulnerable groups of society, are living in or near wetlands. Wetlands have therefore a key role to play in adaptation.

In addition, there are other important issues of wetlands and climate change mitigation. In particular, I would like to call your urgent attention to the issue of greenhouse gas emissions from one particular type of wetland – peatlands – when it is degraded by human activities. Peatlands cover 3% of the global land surface and form a significant proportion of all inland wetlands. They are considered to hold 10% of global freshwater reserves and 30% of all terrestrial carbon, representing a store twice as large as the total global forest biomass. Yet recent estimates are that peatland degradation currently results in 3000 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions per year, equivalent to 11.5% of global fossil fuel emissions. Most such emissions are coming from the 13 million ha of degraded peatlands in South-east Asia, which although covering only 0.1 % of the global land surface are responsible for an estimated 8% of global emissions.

Your discussions in this conference have been focusing on the issue of deforestation and forest degradation, but it is unclear if the degraded and already deforested peatlands are included in the mechanisms that are being set up to address this. We believe that these peatlands must be prioritized within the range of climate change mitigation measures on reduced emissions from deforestation and degradation. I therefore call on all Parties of the UNFCCC, many of which are of course also Parties to the Ramsar Convention, to fully acknowledge and respond to the issues related to wetland degradation, and the opportunities offered by wetland conservation and restoration for mitigation and adaptation.

I must also stress the benefits from many types of vegetated wetlands, not just peatlands, in their acting as net carbon sinks. Global recognition is emerging that well-managed wetlands can provide a key contribution in the development and implementation of realistic National Adaptation Plans for Action (NAPAs) in all national and regional economic development settings. The Ramsar community's long experience of wetland management and restoration has much here to contribute, and I urge that full recognition of the important roles of wetlands be included in NAPAs.

All our countries face an ever-increasing burden of responding to the decisions and processes of many different agreements, yet the resources and capacity to do so remain severely limited. We are still, at both national and international levels, continuing to work in parallel and sectorally rather than cross-sectorally on our responses to different commitments – MDGs, climate mitigation, different MEAs etc. It is clear, however, that continuing such a way of thinking and operating will not help, and will likely hinder, achieving these different goals and targets.

Mr President and distinguished delegates, what is essential is a much more effectively integrated and collaborative partnership approach, within nations and among nations, in order to apply all our respective knowledge and capacities to tackle these urgent matters. The issue of responding to climate change provides a clear opportunity to catalyse and bring together such an approach. I therefore urge each nation to create a framework inclusive of all overlapping government institutions, that coordinates with donors, civil society and the private sector to lead a national environmental partnership - an umbrella organization empowered politically and in law by governments to guide and respond to issues of atmosphere, land and water management, so that our world's wetlands, forests and other ecosystems can continue to deliver their essential services to us all as we adapt and respond to the changing climate.

Thank you.

Anada Tiega
Secretary General
Convention on Wetlands



[Shorter version, DCP, that Anada delivered. The preceding longer one was handed out.]

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Yet whilst wetlands are – according to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) – amongst the most valuable ecosystems in terms of the benefits they provide to people, they are also still the most rapidly degrading ecosystems in the world. I therefore call on all Parties to the UNFCCC, many of which are of course also Parties to the Ramsar Convention, to fully acknowledge and respond to the issues related to wetland degradation, and to the opportunities offered by wetland conservation and restoration for mitigation and adaptation. In particular I urge you to pay attention to the emerging importance of peatlands, which are believed to hold 30% of all terrestrial carbon, but whose degradation, particularly of forested peatlands in southeast Asia, is estimated to be responsible for 8% of global carbon emissions.

Global recognition is emerging that well-managed wetlands can provide a key contribution to the development and implementation of realistic National Adaptation Plans for Action (NAPAs) in all national and regional economic development settings. The Ramsar community's long experience of wetland management and restoration has much to contribute here, and I urge that full recognition of the important roles of wetlands be included in NAPAs.

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different commitments – MDGs, climate mitigation, different MEAs, etc. It is clear, however, that continuing such a way of thinking and operating will not help, and will likely hinder, achieving these different goals and targets.

Mr President and distinguished delegates, what is essential for us all is a much more effectively integrated and collaborative partnership approach, within nations and among nations, in order to apply all our respective knowledge and capacities to tackling these urgent matters. The issue of responding to climate change provides a clear opportunity to catalyse and bring together such an approach. I therefore urge each nation to create a framework inclusive of all overlapping government institutions, one that coordinates with donors, civil society and the private sector to lead a national environmental partnership - an umbrella organization empowered politically and in law by governments to guide and respond to issues of atmosphere, land and water management, so that our world's wetlands, forests and other ecosystems can continue to deliver their essential services to us all as we adapt and respond to the changing climate.

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