

## Opening remarks by the IUCN Director-General Julia Marton-Lefèvre at the briefing session on the IUCN World Parks Congress 2014

15 July 2014, International Environment House 2, Geneva, Switzerland

Your Excellency Ambassador Woolcott,

Mr Jan Dusik, Director of UNEP Regional Office for Europe,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Dear Colleagues

We are now just four months before the IUCN World Parks Congress convenes this November in Sydney, Australia.

The ten-yearly World Parks Congress is where the world gets together to chart the future for some of the world’s most valuable natural areas.

Today, 14% of land and nearly 3% of the oceans is covered by what we at IUCN call ‘protected areas’.

These are national parks, marine reserves, World Heritage sites and Ramsar-listed wetlands, as well as many community and privately conserved areas.

Today we have 200,000 of these areas which come in all shapes and sizes.

Protected areas conserve threatened wildlife and help people reconnect with nature.

But they do that much more.

Protected areas provide drinking water to many of the world’s largest cities.

They store the same amount of carbon as tropical forests.

They also sustain the burgeoning tourism industry and protect communities against disasters.

This is a great success, but as I’m sure you’ve already guessed, we cannot rest on our laurels.

There are still too many gaps in global coverage of key biodiversity areas – in other words, many threatened species and habitats are today not covered by a single protected area.

Too many protected areas are still just ‘paper parks’ – underfunded and poorly managed.

Finally, we are up against new and serious threats – from global climate change to the escalating poaching crisis in Africa and elsewhere.

The World Parks Congress will chart a roadmap for the next decade in addressing these and other threats and seizing the opportunities.

Influenced by the discussions at the last World Parks Congress, held in Durban, South Africa in 2003, governments at the 2010 meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity agreed on the ambitious global target: *to achieve protection for at least 17% of terrestrial and 10% of the marine environments by 2020*.

At this year’s World Parks Congress we will take stock of progress towards achieving this global target.

Furthermore, in Sydney, we wish to raise the bar even higher and to position protected areas firmly within the wider goals of economic and community well-being.

We hope to demonstrate how protected areas can offer solutions to the key challenges of climate change, energy, food and water security, disaster risk reduction and many others.

Ultimately, we wish to showcase how protected areas can contribute to the broader sustainable development goals.

This is what we are hoping to convey through *The Promise of Sydney* – the key outcome document of the World Parks Congress.

My colleague Trevor Sandwith, Director of the World Parks Congress, will discuss this in greater detail.

We are already fortunate to have a strong show of interest in this year’s Congress, with nearly 3,000 delegates registered so far, including several heads of State, environment ministers and heads of international organizations.

At the same time, we believe that we can do even better in reaching out to sectors beyond conservation, and engaging them not only at the Congress but also beyond.

Tourism, fisheries, forestry, health and extractive industry are just some of the sectors that are heavily dependent on healthy nature – and by extension – on healthy protected areas.

We are also keen to ensure that the voices of those who are living in and in close proximity to protected areas – Indigenous Peoples, farmers and pastoralists – are heard in these global discussions.

Finally, we are putting a strong emphasis on inspiring a new generation to take care of existing and future protected areas, be they urban dwellers or young people.

For this purpose we are engaging a number of Champions – from the worlds of sport, music and entertainment – to carry the message.

Finally, if there is one message we would like people to take home from Sydney is that protected areas are the best investment in our own – and our planet’s – future.

Thank you.