

Ms Martha Chouchena-Rojas World Conservation Union (IUCN)

As IUCN, we are honoured to have been invited by the President of Palau, His Excellency Tommy Remengesau, Jr, and to be here in the presence of island nations and conservation organizations that are working towards the conservation of island biological diversity.

We have all spent several days in the COP negotiations listening to the numerous calls on the need to move decisively towards the implementation of the Convention's commitments. It is thus extremely gratifying to be here and see a group of governments and organizations showing that implementation and collective action *can* happen and that this partnership will put into practice the Programme of Work on Island Biodiversity negotiated at this COP.

This partnership is significant both by the high level of threat to biodiversity that it is to address but also by the level of the responses proposed. Indeed, island biodiversity is severely threatened. The 2004 Global Species Assessment led by IUCN found, for example, that 72% of recorded extinctions in five animal groups (mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles and mollusks) since 1500 A.D. have occurred on islands. The partnership is proposing the protection of 30% of marine ecosystems, which represents a quantum leap if one takes into account that only 1% of the seas is currently protected. This initiative will thus be crucial in contributing to the achievement of the 2010 biodiversity target and to the 2012 target on marine protected areas.

I would also like to highlight a point made by the President: 600 million people live in these islands. Biodiversity is critical to the livelihoods of island communities as it provides fisheries, water for agriculture and other services. Island peoples have also an enormous capital in terms of cultural diversity and the traditional knowledge developed on island biological resources and their use. This partnership, by ensuring the maintenance of the services and resources on which these communities depend and respecting their culture and knowledge, should also contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and in particular that on poverty reduction.

IUCN has many government and NGO members in island states, and many member organizations working to conserve island biodiversity outside their own countries. In addition, many of IUCN's expert networks are active in island biodiversity conservation, in particular the Invasive Species Specialist Group of the IUCN Species Survival Commission and the Task Force on Island Conservation and Protected Areas of the World Commission on Protected Areas. IUCN's Global Marine Programme has done significant work on island coral reefs, and the IUCN Ecosystem Management Programme has embarked on a joint island ecosystem management and restoration capacity building initiative together with the government of Italy.

IUCN is also proud to announce the opening of a regional office for Oceania in Fiji, which we hope will be able to make a significant contribution to island biodiversity conservation, in collaboration with IUCN members and Commission experts working in that region.

We in the World Conservation Union stand ready with our members, secretariat and networks of experts to support the outstanding effort that we are celebrating today, and that should provide a model for action in other parts of the world.