

CMS COP12 HIGHLIGHTS: SUNDAY, 22 OCTOBER 2017

On Sunday, the twelfth meeting the Conference of the Parties (COP12) to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) was preceded by a day of high-level events, including a leaders' dialogue in the morning, a high-level panel in the afternoon, and the Migratory Species Champions Award Ceremony in the evening.

LEADERS' DIALOGUE

The Leaders' Dialogue brought together ministers, leaders from the private sector, and non-governmental entities under the theme "Moving Towards a Pollution-Free Planet." Participants discussed three key threats to wildlife: marine debris, pollution from pesticides, and lead.

Rico Hizon, BBC World News, moderated the event. Underscoring that "the future is today," he urged attendees to make commitments and build partnerships to save wildlife.

Roy Cimatu, Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources, the Philippines, emphasized that marine pollution is a growing and persistent global concern. He highlighted national policies to phase out, regulate, or ban plastic bags. Announcing the Coastal and Marine Ecosystem Management Program, Cimatu said that the Philippines will address threats and drivers of marine degradation holistically.

Drawing attention to the more than 12.6 million annual deaths due to pollution, Ibrahim Thiaw, UN Environment, said "what is killing us now is our lifestyle." He called on governments, civil society, and private sector partners to make commitments to reduce pollution at the third UN Environment Assembly in December 2017.

Bradnee Chambers, CMS Executive Secretary, urged for greater private sector engagement with the CMS, stating that "profit does not need to be a race to the bottom." On pesticides, for instance, he recalled impacts on species' decline, citing the collapse of vultures in Africa.

As the keynote speaker, Peter Nitschke, Plastic Bank, noted the existence of 40 billion tonnes of plastic on earth, stating "we are producing 300 billion kilograms of plastic annually." He said that by 2050 the amount of plastics in the ocean could match global fish stocks. He reported on the work of Plastic Bank with respect to partnerships, training, and technologies that can mitigate the excessive use of plastics. Concluding, he called for: creating new laws on waste and their implementation; promoting public awareness on proper waste management; establishing more public-private partnerships; investing in a circular rather than a linear economic model; and creating incentives for innovation in packaging and recycling.

Participants discussed, *inter alia*: lack of political will and leadership; the need to aim for zero waste; private sector opportunities for recycling management; legislative frameworks for waste management; communication challenges, particularly between the private and public sectors; Bhutan's commitment to carbon neutrality; Kenya's ban on plastic bags; and Sweden and Indonesia's investments to combat marine pollution.

Hizon concluded the debate by committing to make more people aware of the problems of pollution through the BBC, which reaches 400 million homes around the world, and inviting participants to join the campaign #BeatPollution.

HIGH-LEVEL PANEL DISCUSSION

The High-level Panel focused on how CMS implementation can contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Rico Hizon, BBC World News, moderated the panel.

Roy Cimatu, Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources, the Philippines, invited the panel to bring wildlife to the center of sustainable development.

Bradnee Chambers, CMS Executive Secretary, called for a focus on the practical aspects of interlinkages between migratory species and the SDGs, including the multiple values of ecosystem services to sustainable development.

In a keynote address, David Pritchard, Independent Consultant, explained the Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2015-2023 provides an overarching vision on how migratory species and CMS implementation can deliver on sustainable development objectives.

John Scanlon, CITES Secretary-General, stressed the need to address the intersection between people, employment, and industry in practical terms.

Citing a "deficit in thinking," Executive Secretary Chambers emphasized the need to: assess the economic value of migratory species; overcome suspicions between the CMS and sustainable development communities; and raise awareness.

Tarsicio Granizo Tamayo, Minister of Environment, Ecuador, underscored the importance of: moving beyond the national level in wildlife conservation; linking conservation to poverty reduction; and coordinating CMS with other UN conventions, including biodiversity, climate, and desertification.

Abdul Hamid Zakri, Malaysia, stressed that migratory species are key to human well-being. Susan Lieberman, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), underlined the need to look beyond the commercialization of species, and to understand their role within intact ecosystems.

Kosi Latu, Director General, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), argued that, although wildlife has an economic value, cultural and spiritual values are overlooked and deserve greater attention from leaders.

Gamini Jayawickrama Perera, Minister of Sustainable Development and Wildlife, Sri Lanka, highlighted the dangers of people's growing disconnection with nature and suggested focusing on youth education.

Godfrey Kiwanda Ssuubi, Minister for Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, Uganda, underscored that conservation contributes to 80% of tourism in Uganda, and is therefore an economic asset.

Chan Somaly, Cambodia, noted the need to integrate the value of biodiversity into national development policies, focus on implementation, and integrate the private sector into these efforts.

Barbara Thomson, Ministry of Environmental Affairs, South Africa, said conservation and sustainable development are almost one and the same thing.

Ibrahim Thiaw, UN Environment, argued there is not a deficit in thinking but in implementation and integration, both in national governments and the fragmented system of international conventions.

Cristiana Paşca Palmer, Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity, added that another deficit is political will and called for reaching out beyond the CMS community.

Hany Muhammed Ali Tatwany, Saudi Wildlife Authority, described how his country has started to involve the private sector, local communities, and the government to achieve sustainable conservation.

Rita Schwarzelühr-Sutter, German Parliamentary State Secretary for Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety, said the UNESCO biosphere reserves focus on sustainable use and conservation of resources and provide practical connections to sustainable development.

Tamás Marhescu, International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation, emphasized the need to change the current sustainability model so that the environment is the foundation rather than a pillar of sustainability. Stefan Leiner, Acting Director General for Natural Capital, European Commission, recommended "the wedding cake" illustration of the Stockholm Resilience Centre, where economies and societies are embedded parts of the biosphere, as a good basis for interlinkages with the SDGs.

Marku Lamp, Ministry of the Environment, Estonia, urged using modern communication channels to reach a wider audience to emphasize the connections between migratory species and sustainable development.

José Pedro de Oliveira Costa, National Secretary for Biodiversity and Forests, Ministry of Environment, Brazil, cited the symbolism of South Atlantic whales as a communication tool that can reach "hearts and minds."

Siddhanta Das, Director General of Forests, India, underlined the importance of strong legal systems and local community cooperation.

Angel Daneris Santana, Deputy Minister of Protected Areas and Biodiversity, Dominican Republic, stressed the need for capacity building, including the creation of new livelihoods.

Echoing that strong laws deter illegal trade, Harlad Fries, Swedish Ambassador to the Philippines, added that information and public awareness destroy illegal markets.

CMS Executive Secretary Chambers expanded on the theme of sustainable tourism, noting the opportunities within national parks, citing Costa Rica's success in generating income from sustainable tourism.

Jonas Leones, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the Philippines, recalled that the Philippines has approximately seven thousand islands, where migratory birds are abundant and an important source of income for communities.

CITES Secretary-General Scanlon reminded that the SDGs are people-centered and mentioned that if local people have a say about the wildlife they coexist with, conservation would be more effective.

Yeshey Dorji, Minister of Agriculture and Forests, Bhutan, recalled how the notion of "happiness" has been informing national growth and environmental conservation.

Latu noted that the philosophy of ecotourism is that a live shark, whale, or turtle is worth more than a dead one, but to be successful, local communities must receive social and economic benefits.

Lieberman called for ensuring that one country does not invest in ecotourism while at the same time the species are subject to unsustainable use elsewhere, saying collaboration across migratory routes is vital.

Marghescu said photographic and hunting tourism are compatible, but bans lead to lost income for local communities.

Somaly said Cambodia has increased its protected areas and ecotourism-based development. Isabelle Rosabrunetto, Monaco, reported that whale watching is a key ecotourism activity and the Oceanographic Museum provides important biodiversity information to promote awareness. Thomson emphasized the role of policy review to ensure full participation and flow of benefits from ecotourism to local communities. Granizo highlighted the importance of ecotourism in the Galapagos Islands adding that clear standards on sustainable use are key to managing the sector.

Schwarzelühr-Sutter urged for cooperation among CMS, CITES, and the Regional Fisheries Management Organizations to improve management of endangered marine species. Ssuubi called for ecotourism revenue-sharing with populations around conservation areas. Perera said that national parks attract visitors to rural areas. Stressing that "we should not put all our eggs in one basket," Costa drew attention to the fragility of ecotourism to war and natural disasters.

Thomson highlighted the need for more effective awareness campaigns and legal instruments to protect, conserve, and manage migratory species. Leones underscored that community participation in conservation initiatives is vital. Schwarzelühr-Sutter noted the importance of focusing on human-wildlife coexistence and compensation mechanisms.

Thiaw argued that the value of species for protecting human health is underestimated and called for better economics to inform member states, the private sector, and other stakeholders. Yann Arthus-Bertrand, UN Environment Goodwill Ambassador, recalled the "brutal" decline in wildlife and referred to it as a "wake up call."

Leones closed the panel and invited non-parties to join the CMS Family.

IN THE CORRIDORS

As COP12 delegates ponder the interlinkages between wildlife conservation and the SDGs, many at Sunday's High-level Panel noted that the theme of the meeting accurately represents their expectations: "Sustainable Development for Wildlife and People." Synergies and increased cooperation between multilateral environmental agreements is clearly a high priority for some. Others, however, are more concerned about on-the-ground implementation, saying there's been enough strategy and planning, and that action on the ground is more urgent than ever. As the 2020 deadline for the Aichi Biodiversity Targets quickly approaches, one delegate said we've not adequately dealt with the threat of habitat destruction on migratory species.

Many hoped that the High-level Panel would provide the needed weight to these interlinkages, which will be incorporated into the Manila Declaration on Sustainable Development and Migratory Species, and provide greater visibility to the COP message to the global community that "their future is our future." As one panelist commented afterwards, we can no longer discuss species in the abstract: species are part of the bigger picture, including the economy, human health, and society. Others agreed that now is the time to break the barriers between wildlife conservation and sustainable development.