

Conference of the European Parliament Intergroup on Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development

***“ISLANDS AND OVERSEAS ENTITIES’ CONTRIBUTION TO BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AND THE FIGHT AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE”***

IUCN opening statement

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**Honorable members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen**

I thank Mr. Ponga for the opportunity to speak on this important issue of Islands and Overseas Entities’ contribution to biodiversity conservation and the fight against climate change.

**(1) Europe Overseas as a European asset in a regional and global context**

The European Union (EU) includes **34 overseas territories**: 9 Outermost Regions and 25 Overseas Countries and Territories (thereafter Europe Overseas). They cover an area of 4.4 million km<sup>2</sup>, equivalent in size to continental Europe, and have a combined Exclusive Economic Zone of over 15 million km<sup>2</sup>, the largest in the world. They are found in:

- **biodiversity hotspots** (the Caribbean Islands, Madagascar and the Indian Ocean Islands, the Mediterranean Basin, New Caledonia, Polynesia-Micronesia),
- **major wilderness areas** (Guyana shield), and
- key regions for **polar ecosystems** and fish stocks (Greenland, Falkland Islands (Malvinas), French Southern and Antarctic Territories, South Georgia).

Europe overseas has more **endemic animal and plant species** than are found on the whole of continental Europe. New Caledonia alone has about as many endemic species as the entire European continent, and French Guiana includes an area of Amazon rainforest the size of Portugal. Europe overseas also hosts more than 20% of the world’s coral reefs and lagoons.

The biodiversity of these entities is highly vulnerable to human impacts such as habitat destruction, alien invasive species, over-exploitation of natural resources, pollution, and increasingly the impacts of climate change. They share these threats with **small island developing states** and countries of their regions.

Europe overseas are also diverse in terms of their socio-economic circumstances. Most of them islands, they share common **vulnerabilities linked to their insularity and/or remoteness**, being characterized by **small economies with dependence** on few commodities (agriculture, Fisheries, tourism), food and energy imports and in many cases limited capacity to effectively manage their unique heritage.

IUCN recently released report on ***Future Directions for Biodiversity Action in Europe Overseas: Outcomes of the review of the implementation of the convention on Biological Diversity (2010)*** which painted a patchy picture, with achievements in specific areas such as protected areas against the CBD island biodiversity programme of work, an overall lack of awareness of CBD obligations, significant gap in biodiversity planning and programmes, and no participation in regional policies and programmes.

This is in part because of their **complex status** vis-a-vis the European Union and the EU member state which results in fragmentation of policies and programmes both at the EU and regional level, and in part because of the a **limited visibility of Europe overseas with EU and international institutions**.

**Efforts to bridge that gap** needs to consider **innovative governance arrangements** and **financial mechanisms** to facilitate a more strategic approach at the European and regional level.

Yet Europe overseas strategic location and unique assets offer **leadership opportunities** for the EU and EU Member states in biodiversity conservation, climate change adaption, green economy, renewable energy and marine conservation in regional and international fora.

- The recently adopted CBD Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 provides an excellent compass to address the continuing problem of the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services. Europe's commitment to the global biodiversity goals set by the CBD will benefit from action in its overseas territories. In this respect, the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its 20 Aichi Targets, agreed in Nagoya in October 2010, provide a strong framework of work not only at the global level, but also at the regional and national level.

In this regard, IUCN is working with several other partners, including the CBD Secretariat and the Government of India - which will host the next COP - to develop indicators that can be used at national level to help countries internalize and measure progress in the implementation of the Aichi Targets.

IUCN has also submitted its report on "*Future Directions for Biodiversity Action in Europe Overseas: Outcomes of the Review of the Implementation of the CBD*" (2010) to the ongoing **In-depth Review of the CBD Island Programme of Work, which will be considered at the next CBD COP in India, 2012.**

- Europe **overseas can showcase natural solutions to global challenges in climate change, food security and economic development.** IUCN promotes a "nature-based solutions" approach, which in concrete terms, means an ecosystem-based adaptation and mitigation approach to climate change, to food security and an economic development model which recognizes the importance of nature and values investments in natural infrastructure which can complement engineered solutions.

**Healthy island ecosystems** help adapt to climate change, reduce emissions and support island economies. Conservation, restoration and effective management of ecosystems will help safeguard islands from the negative impacts of climate change and maintain social, economical and environmental benefits now and for future generations.

**Rio +20** will provide an opportunity to renew all these commitments which value nature and its role in providing the foundation of lifestyles, and to promote a model of governance which revolves around three major principles: the importance of involving civil society in decision making for sustainable development; the importance of ensuring social and intergenerational equity without which there can be no sustainable development; the promotion a rights-based approach including the right to relevant information to environmental decision making.

**IUCN World Conservation Congress** to take place in September 2012 will be a good opportunity for IUCN Members, including both Governments and civil society, to express support for the commitments which the international community will make at Rio+20, including those which will be of particular

importance or relevance to islands and Europe overseas as regard fighting climate change, biodiversity loss and ensuring sustainable development.

These are some reasons why IUCN **calls for increased action to protect the natural heritage of Europe overseas**. The connection between local communities, biodiversity and ecosystem services, and the impacts of climate change must be recognized to help these regions flourish. They need to effectively participate in global, European, national and regional biodiversity policies and programmes.

## (2) Recent EU policy and programme initiatives and Europe overseas

The conference on the ***“EU and its Overseas Entities: Strategies to Counter Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss,”*** convened by IUCN, which took place in La Reunion in 2008 under the French Presidency, created a **political momentum** at the EU and international stage for the recognition of islands and overseas entities’ assets and specificities.

IUCN is encouraged by a number of important EU policy initiatives that have acknowledged Europe overseas contribution since 2008.

Following the **EU 2008 Communiqué on “Outermost regions: An Advantage for Europe”**, the launch of *Europe 2020*, there is recognition of the place of ORs in Europe’s future policies and programmes. The potentialities of ORs, including their environmental assets as wealth opportunities and benefits to the European Union, as well as the specific challenges they face, are informing the review of EU regional policies post-2013.

A **Memorandum of Understanding** between the governments of France, Spain, Portugal and the Presidents of ORs of Canary Islands, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Madeira, Martinique and Reunion (May2010) for a renewed vision of the European Strategy for ORs.

The **Council of the European Union have just adopted a number of conclusions on integrated maritime policy (IMP)**, and I quote the Council who: “REITERATES the need to take into account the role and the importance of the outermost regions of the EU and interested associated overseas countries and territories in the development and implementation of IMP; ENCOURAGES the Commission and Member States to develop initiatives aimed at reinforcing the integration of maritime policies in outermost regions and interested overseas countries and territories, and INVITES the Commission to study how the outermost regions of the EU can contribute to EU's "Blue Growth" initiative".

The **European Parliament report on “The Role of Regional Policy in Addressing the Effects of Climate Change in Outermost Regions”** states that overall EU funding is inadequate in preparing the Outermost regions for the upcoming challenges of climate change, particularly when comparing it with funding provided to non-sustainable regional activities (such as motorized individual traffic, intensive production, ecologically damaging tourism, etc.). The report thus recommends that future projects funded by the EU should be climate-proofed, and notes that additional investments in adaptation and mitigation are needed.

The review of the Overseas Association Decision (OAD) under part IV of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which governs the relationship between the EU and OCTs, is recasting that relationship, with EU MS and OCTs seeking greater consideration of environmental challenges. The new **European Decision on the association of the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) is expected to be adopted in March 2012**.

These developments create **opportunities for greater consideration** of Europe overseas biodiversity and climate change in future EU policies and programmes, and for **collaboration** between EU Member States, ORs and OCTs, civil society and EU institutions including at international and the regional levels.

Much remains to be done, particularly in the area of funding to truly reflect the contribution of Europe overseas. For instance, whilst the recently released EC Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 includes consideration of Europe overseas, recently published LIFE+ regulation and the main financial mechanism for the implementation of the EC Biodiversity strategy so far does not consider OCTs.

More generally, access to funding remains problematic for many OCTs. The latest EC Communication to the EP and the Council (07.12.2011. COM(2011) 837 final on the Preparation of the multiannual financial framework regarding the financing of EU cooperation for African, Caribbean and Pacific States and Overseas Countries and Territories for the 2014-2020 period (11th European Development Fund)) has allocated the amount of EUR 343.4 million for implementing the Association with the OCTs.

IUCN hopes that a significant proportion of this funding will go towards the measures to protect biodiversity and ecosystem services and adaptation to climate change.

**IUCN is very encouraged by the EP preparatory action for the Voluntary Scheme on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in the Territories of European Overseas (BEST), initiated by MEP Mr Ponga, MEP.**

The recently announced results of the **2011 BEST Open Call for Proposals demonstrate the great demand** for such an initiative. It will be however critical to ensure that the BEST preparatory action leads to **long term governance arrangements and financial mechanisms** within the EU policy and programme landscape to realise its full potential.

**IUCN has been a strong advocate of Europe overseas for many years, thanks to the early efforts of IUCN French National Committee.** With the support from the Government of France, the IUCN Europe Overseas Programme is convening a **Europe Overseas Roundtable on Biodiversity and Climate Change**, which brings together all EU overseas actors both government and non government as well as the European Commission, civil society and experts and thus **facilitating dialogue** on key issues at the European level.

IUCN also manages the **Europe Overseas Forum, an online discussion group** which facilitates information exchange and is becoming an important source of information not only for EU overseas but also international audiences.

IUCN received a grant from the BEST Open Call for Proposal for its project "**Building partnerships and awareness of biodiversity and climate change in Europe overseas for the future of BEST**". This project aims to:

- build on the Roundtable process to develop long term proposals for governance and financial mechanisms for the future of a BEST initiative and
- raise the profile of Europe overseas at the EU and international level including through supporting **EU parliament Intergroup on Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable development events** such as today's.

IUCN is looking forward to work with the Roundtable and other partners on this important project.

Today's conference has assembled an impressive group of speakers to generate discussion and identify future actions. It is an important milestone which will set the scene for future activities in 2012.

I wish us all a productive conference.