

**Statement from Robert Hepworth,
Executive Secretary, UNEP/CMS Secretariat
at the 1st Intergovernmental Meeting on Great Apes,
5-9 September 2005, Kinshasa, DR Congo**



Mr Chairman, Ministers, Executive Director, fellow GRASP Partners and supporters, ladies and gentlemen,

When I joined the United Nations (UNEP) as an international civil servant in July 2000, I had dreams. One of my dreams, when we started the GRASP Partnership from UNEP the following year in 2001, with the support of the Executive Director and some dedicated conservationists both inside and outside governments, was to be able to build up to a meeting like this, to be held in the country which is home to more species of great apes than any other – the Democratic Republic of Congo. Also that we could use that meeting not only to demonstrate the commitment of the world to prevent the extinction of great apes but also to promote peace and pride within a country which has endured such suffering, indeed has lived through – and survived – many nightmares in my lifetime. In coming to Kinshasa, we were also inspired by the uplifting meeting on DRC Heritage which UNESCO hosted in Paris in September 2004.

Mr Chairman, the Executive Director of UNEP, Klaus Töpfer, paid me the honour of becoming the Chief Officer of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (UNEP/CMS) just over a year ago. From my new home in Bonn, I have maintained my involvement through participation in the Interim Executive Committee of GRASP which helped to organise this meeting. Moreover my new post has given me the opportunity to strengthen the 'engagement' of the Convention on Migratory Species with great apes.

CMS already covers mountain gorillas and we expect lowland gorillas to be added to the CMS species lists at our conference in Nairobi in 2 ½ months time. Thanks to an initiative by CMS Parties led by Congo Brazzaville, CMS is already a GRASP partner, and of the 10 African range states of gorilla species, 6 are full CMS Parties, 1 is an original CMS signatory and the remaining 3 are Parties to at least one CMS regional Agreement.

I can make an important announcement today about a new project to be co-sponsored initially by the Convention, UNEP and UNESCO (through GRASP), the International Gorilla Conservation Programme (IGCP) and the Royal Institute of Natural Sciences of Belgium. We are also benefiting from funds offered by the Governments of Italy and the United Kingdom. The main objective of the project will be to facilitate the preparation, and negotiation with the Governments of the 10 gorilla Range States, an Agreement and Action Plan under Article IV of the Convention to guarantee the conservation of gorilla populations in these countries.

Regional "Article IV" Agreements are one of the Convention's main tools. We have developed them in a number of different regions of the world and for various groups of species such as seabirds, waterbirds, marine turtles, whales, deer and bats. At our forthcoming Conference of Parties, a new Agreement on West African elephants will be opened for signature, and most of the Range States have already indicated their intention to sign it. A special regional co-ordinating unit led by IUCN and based within the West African region will support the range states and CMS in implementing the elephant agreement. This will be one of the models we can consider as we begin the process of negotiating an Agreement for gorillas in the heart of Africa.

We hope the results will be a CMS Article IV Agreement between the range states, linked to the GRASP Partnership, which will conserve gorillas through:

- Transfrontier collaboration and protected areas
- Inter-state and inter-agency cooperation, with a cost-effective decision making system
- Exchange of scientific and technical information, and joint capacity building
- Development of gorilla ecotourism as a source of conservation and community income
- Participation by approved IGOs and NGOs, including of course the GRASP and other Partnerships including CBFP.
- Viable funding/fundraising mechanisms for the Agreement and associated conservation work.

Such an Agreement – and the additional projects associated with it – will promote the survival and long-term conservation of gorillas and their forest habitats, thereby making a tangible contribution towards meeting the global targets to reduce biodiversity loss by 2010 and help range states to derive economic benefit from conserving their species.

We should not forget the direct benefits that gorilla conservation brings to the local economies. Just in Uganda from 1994-99, ca. 17,546 gorilla tourists were counted, 88% from outside Uganda, with a net foreign exchange earnings of about \$ 7.70 million, which generated \$ 15.40 million of sales, contributed \$ 4.77 million in tax revenues and supported close to 1,700 person years of jobs and contributed \$ 6.93 million to national income. These benefit are expected to grow in the future. Gorilla watching similarly benefits Rwanda and DRC. In DRC there is clearly potential to

increase the incoming benefits. (Eco)tourism has an important role to play in conservation as part of earnings go to wildlife authorities, help implement action plans and ensure the effective guarding of protected areas, create income in surrounding villages and reduce pressure from poaching, bushmeat hunting and illegal logging. There is also a challenge that we all face to ensure that indigenous people also share in the benefits of conservation and ecotourism.

In this context, GRASP as well as future CMS work, are sending a strong message by illustrating how, through the conservation and sustainable use of endangered species like gorillas, it is possible to reduce biodiversity loss, improve local economies and enhance livelihoods: definitely a success story for the sustainable development of Africa. More than that, the GRASP formula of a partnership joining range states, UN organisations, voluntary bodies and the private sector is one we believe could be used for other endangered species such as the critically endangered desert antelopes in North and West Africa, and marine mammals. Coalitions of the willing, with a strong focus on action and partnership between development and conservation objectives, are a tool for the 21st century.

Mr Chairman, through you I congratulate DRC again for its energy and commitment in hosting the conference, and believe it will mark a crucial stage in conserving great apes, not only for our descendants in this 21st century, but for all time.

Thank you.