

MESSAGE:

As you all know, the great apes are our closest relatives and are generally acknowledged as being among the most important living creatures sharing this planet with us. At the same time, as this and a number of other recent meetings have demonstrated, the future of the great apes hangs in the balance and it remains an open question as to whether or not wild populations will be able to survive this century.

Your deliberations in Kinshasa over the past few days have been critically important in answering this question, and have helped to elevate the great ape crisis to the level that it so fully deserves. The Global Strategy that has been developed will be a blueprint for all of us working on behalf of great apes, and the UN Declaration on Great Apes, which you are all about to sign affirms the commitment of your governments and the various agencies present to take the great ape crisis very seriously and to invest resources in great ape conservation at levels commensurate with the challenges that are faced.

Now that we have all expressed our concerns and outlined a clear strategy, it is essential that we move forward with the actions needed to ensure implementation in the field. We must now move beyond our deliberations and engage in the kind of field-based conservation action that is fundamental to ensuring the success of our endeavors.

On behalf of the Primate Specialist Group of the IUCN Species Survival Commission, I would like to congratulate you on your efforts over the past few days and the great responsibilities that you have all agreed to assume. I would also like to reaffirm our strong commitment to continue working in close partnership with GRASP on what are fully shared objectives, and together to commit the human and financial resources to make implementation of this Global Strategy a reality in the remainder of this decade.

Russell A. Mittermeier
Chairman, IUCN/SSC Primate Specialist Group; and
UN Special Envoy on Great Apes