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IUCN is the world's largest environmental knowledge network and has helped over 75 countries to prepare and implement national conservation and biodiversity strategies. IUCN is a multicultural, multilingual organization with 1000 staff located in 62 countries. Its headquarters are in Gland, Switzerland.

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NEWS RELEASE

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MAKE THE ENVIRONMENT THE FUTURE TO MAKE POVERTY HISTORY

Director General urges UN General Assembly to invest in ecosystems

New York, 16 September (IUCN) – The World Conservation Union today urged governments to go beyond the lacklustre outcome of the 2005 World Summit and invest in ecosystems as a way to reduce poverty when Director General Achim Steiner addressed the United Nations General Assembly today.

“Investing in environmental sustainability is an effective and efficient intervention and leverage point for development. In order to make poverty history, we need to make environment the future,” said Steiner.

Steiner also conveyed the Union's mixed appreciation for the 35-page outcome document of the 2005 World Summit.

“The World Conservation Union welcomes the Outcome Document for citing many of the major issues currently on the multilateral agenda, yet, like many who have spoken before me, we are disappointed that it offers little progress beyond what was agreed at past Summits such as Johannesburg or indeed Rio,” said Steiner.

To its credit, the agreement reaffirms the sustainability dimension of the development agenda of the United Nations, amongst other multilateral issues such as human rights, peace and security and UN reform, and that it links conservation and development.

“The outcome recognises the crucial role of conservation and sustainable management of natural resources in eradicating poverty and in achieving the other Millennium Development Goals, but offers little guidance on the practical implications of this statement,” said Steiner.

Close to four pages are dedicated to environmental issues. It specifies for instance measures on all the different ecosystems – from forests to marine – and includes major issues such as climate change. However, in many instances it represents no incremental progress: some text is drawn from previous agreements such as the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, agreed in 2002.

For many observers, this is disappointing given the multitude of assessments that have been published before the Summit which show that urgent action is needed. Even though there is some progress by governments and civil society, it is clear that we are far from achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

“We must acknowledge that the pace of progress towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals is too slow. This outcome fails to appreciate how much we still have to do to reduce poverty, achieve environmental sustainability and the other MDGs; it is more reflective of political divisions than of our shared knowledge about the state of the world, natural resources and their potential to sustain development,” said Steiner.

Steiner used the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and the recent study by the Poverty-Environment Partnership to illustrate that the development agenda and the environmental agenda cannot be treated as separate.

The degradation and loss of ecosystem services undermine efforts for poverty reduction, and conservation in turn can deliver substantial benefits to poor communities and national economies.

“The situation requires an urgent response: we must ensure that the United Nations, civil society and the private sector nurture the environmental goose that lays the golden eggs of sustainable livelihoods,” said Steiner.

More information

The Summit document can be found at <http://www.un.org/>

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For the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment:
<http://www.millenniumassessment.org/>

For the Poverty-Environment Partnership study:
<http://www.undp.org/pei/>