

Feedback by Mr Bridgewater / Ramsar Convention Secretary General

Mr. Bridgewater thanked the Netherlands and the FAO for making this conference happening. It was timely and the Conference had the right focus on action. He appreciated the very good progress already achieved in the discussions.

He reminded participants of the political pledges made by world leaders in Johannesburg in 2002, to slow the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010 and pledges regarding the status of the world's water resources and associated natural resources. However, we are still far from reaching these objectives.

He identified what he thought to be the key new issue: Balancing water for human needs, and water for ecological needs, through an ecosystem approach. He was happy to note that this integration of issues was also highlighted in the working group sessions

Mr Bridgewater called for a focus on the question "How much water can we risk taking from our ecosystems?", since we cannot afford ourselves to think "what water can we allow for ecosystems?", as was mentioned on the first day of the conference. We should not forget about the vast range of services provided by ecosystems, which seem to be taken for granted (e.g. food, flood mitigation, shelter, water storage, absorbing carbon dioxide and even producing oxygen). This will be reported also by the forthcoming Millenium Ecosystem Assessment to the Secrteray General of the United Nations (expected 30 March 2005).

He identified four ways forward, and noted that these issues were also discussed in the working groups:

1. Institutions and Governance. He noted in particular, as did Ms van Ardenne, the key role of the private sector. A good example is the support provided by the Danone group to projects under the Ramsar Convention, but a lot more partnerships can be developed. Furthermore, the discussion on water rights is another good example in discussions on governance and institutions.
2. Linking of marine systems with terrestrial systems, and vice-versa. More knowledge and strategic decisions are to be taken into account on the linkages between sea and land, also in relation to safety issues.
3. Understanding and managing within global change, notably climate change.
4. Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) or outreach. Access to information is absolutely needed in order to be able to reflect on actions on the local level.

Mr Bridgewater further reflected on the role and purpose of the Ramsar's Convention towards the conservation and wise use of wetlands. Wetlands and associated ecosystems are crucial in water management since they are water users, water providers, water connectors and water purifiers. Furthermore they are used for many services, including: fishing and hunting, irrigation and agriculture.

He highlighted that the Ramsar Convention plays a pivotal role in global water governance, because it integrates all aspects of the water cycle, "from the mountains to the sea". The conventions already have policies for water for food and ecosystems at the global level e.g. the River Basin Initiative (with CBD) which aims to multiply information on river basin scale. The Convention will further work on tools for integrated management and on integration for the conservation and wise use of biodiversity and water into the broader environmental agenda in order to ensure that we have water for food and ecosystems, or better, ecosystems for water and food.

Finally Mr. Bridgewater called for active participation on the next Ramsar CoP in Uganda in November 2005.