

MADAGASCAR DECLARATION FOCUSES AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT POLICIES ON THE VALUE OF NATURE

Ambitious goals for reducing poverty and disease in Africa are unattainable without radical changes that make biodiversity and its socio-economic value the foundation for development policies, a global environmental conference concluded on 24 June 2006.

The symposium, organized by Conservation International, entitled "Defying Nature's End: the African Context", produced a five-page Madagascar Declaration that challenges traditional aid and development models for the world's poorest and most disease-ridden continent.

Among its conclusions, the Declaration states that African nations and international development agencies such as the United Nations and the World Bank should recognize that conserving Africa's rich biodiversity is fundamental to achieving sustainable development and reducing poverty. The Declaration calls such natural benefits essential if there is to be hope for African nations to achieve the Millennium Development Goals set by the United Nations in 2000 to achieve significant progress in reducing poverty worldwide by 2015.

The five-day conference of more than 300 delegates began on 20 June 2006. Madagascar was chosen to host the gathering of environmental and development leaders because of its unique and threatened biodiversity, including lemurs and other flora and fauna found nowhere else, and because of the Government of Madagascar's programme to triple the country's protected territory to a total of 6 million ha.

The final Declaration calls for creating and expanding markets for Africa's nature, such as ecotourism and carbon trading, to derive economic benefits from the continent's most valuable resource. Other necessary steps include:

- conserving Africa's most important biodiversity by expanding and strengthening protected area networks, together with the creation of sustainable financing mechanisms such as conservation trust funds;
- protecting and restoring key ecological systems linked to freshwater supply

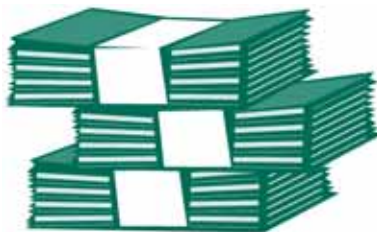
and quality, such as upper-water catchment forests and the rivers flowing from them;

- providing economic incentives for local communities to manage their forests and other natural resources sustainably;
- ensuring that government spending on poverty reduction is based on environmental sustainability;
- ensuring participation of the business community in seeking solutions to environmental degradation caused by industrial development; and,
- prioritizing sustainable agriculture practices and alternatives to fuelwood and charcoal as energy sources to reduce deforestation and the health risks from inhalation of smoke from cooking and heating fires.

(Source: Conservation International press release, 24 June 2006.)

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NEW MULTIMILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENTS WILL HELP PROTECT HIMALAYAN SPECIES

WWF and the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) announced in May 2006 a US\$5 million investment programme to pioneer new ways of conserving the immense natural wealth of the eastern Himalayan region.

The programme will provide grants for NGOs, community groups and other sectors of civil society to help save the highest priority species, sites and landscapes for conservation in Bhutan, northeastern India and parts of Nepal. (Source: CEPF E-News, June 2006.)

US\$20 MILLION PLEDGED TO PROTECT AMAZON

United States philanthropists Victoria and Roger W. Sant have pledged to donate US\$20 million to the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) to help create a huge conservation area in the Brazilian tropical forest.

Parts of the Amazon River basin, one of the world's most biologically rich places, are being rapidly bulldozed for ranching, farming, logging and other development. The Sants' money, in the form of a trust, will be used to further the goal of permanently protecting 125 million acres (50 585 700 ha), an area roughly the size of California. It is the largest individual gift that WWF has received.

The Sants have donated millions for other environmental causes. The idea of giving to the Amazon was appealing to them because it was so ambitious. It also helped that they have made several trips to the region to see it for themselves.

The Amazon Region Protected Area initiative began four years ago, with WWF working with the Brazilian Government, World Bank and others. It has set the goal of establishing 70 million acres (28 327 992 ha) of new strictly protected areas, transforming 31 million acres (12 545 254 ha) of neglected parkland into better-managed conservation zones and setting aside 22 million acres (8 903 083 ha) of "sustainable use reserves" to benefit local communities. (Source: *Washington Post*, 27 May 2006 [in *Amazon News*, 1 June 2006].)

GIANT PANDA ECOLOGICAL CORRIDOR

Sichuan Province's giant panda habitat joined the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) World Heritage list yesterday and experts regard this as a golden opportunity to integrate scattered habitats to protect the endangered species more effectively. The habitat was included on the list at the 30th session of the World Heritage Committee held in Vilnius, Lithuania.

The protection of the habitat as a whole will radically change the fragmented and island-like plight of panda habitats and enlarge the genetic pool of the species.

The 9 500 km² habitat covers nine scenic spots and eight nature reserves. About 300 giant pandas and other rare wildlife species live in the area. The area is a good base for

creating a holistic panda preservation plan and gives the animals the chance to migrate.

"We have already launched a programme called the giant panda ecological corridor," an official said. "We are removing all human interference in the domain of the giant panda, including the removal of factories and other constructions."

Initially put forward in 1987, the programme plants bamboo forests among the relatively isolated giant panda habitats so that they will be connected.

The Qinling tunnel is an example. For two decades, two groups of giant pandas living in the Qinling Mountains in northwest China's Shaanxi Province have been separated from each other by a national highway. Now the highway has been abandoned after construction of a tunnel, and workers have begun efforts to rejoin the two groups. To do this, rangers from the Mount Guanyin Nature Reserve and social volunteers have begun planting approximately 90 ha of bamboo on top of a 1 900-m-long highway tunnel that runs through the Qinling Mountains. This will allow free passage between the two isolated panda groups.

Biologists estimate that there are now approximately 1 590 giant pandas living in the wild worldwide, mostly in the mountainous areas of southwest China's Sichuan Province. There are only 273 giant pandas living in the Qinling area. [Source: *Shanghai Daily* [China], 20 May and 13 July 2006.]

EUROPEAN UNION ANNOUNCES PLAN TO FIGHT EXTINCTION OF PLANTS AND ANIMALS

The European Union (EU) has laid out a plan to halt losses of plant and animal species by 2010 as part of a global drive to slow what could be the worst spate of extinctions since the dinosaurs were wiped out.

The European Commission presented a paper with guidelines for the EU's 25 member states and institutions such as the European Parliament on halting loss of biodiversity, which it said was harming efforts to boost economies and improve the environment. The Commission said that 43 percent of Europe's native bird species, 45 percent of butterflies, 45 percent of reptiles and 52 percent of freshwater fish faced extinction in Europe alone.

Its plan, which did not include new legislation, covered financing, decision-

making and promoting awareness, the Commission said in a statement. The environmental group Greenpeace said that the EU's plans were not sufficient and that more was needed from them.

EU nations agreed in 2001 to "halt the loss of biodiversity" on the continent by 2010 – tougher than a global goal set in 2002 of "a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss" by 2010. [Source: Reuters, 23 May 2006 [in Environmental News Network (ENN) Newsletter].]



CENTRAL AFRICA'S FIRST DEBT-FOR-NATURE SWAP

France and Cameroon signed the first-ever Central African debt-for-nature swap today (26 June 2006). This agreement will invest at least US\$25 million over the next five years to protect part of the world's second largest tropical forest, home to elephants, gorillas, hundreds of bird species and indigenous groups such as the Ba'Aka pygmies.

The agreement comes from France's Debt Development Contract (C2D), a complement to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative (HIPC), a joint undertaking by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

The document requires Cameroon to earmark funds in four different sectors: education, health, infrastructure and natural resources. This is the first C2D agreement to allocate funds to the latter.

"The importance of this unique and history-making agreement lies in the combination of debt forgiveness and investment in forest conservation and local communities," said Laurent Some, director of the Central Africa Regional Programme Office of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

Through the funds, the Forest and Environment Development Programme – a programme to reduce poverty while

protecting and managing natural forestry resources – will be implemented. Funding will be used to manage protected areas, wildlife and forest production better and increase community forest resources and research capacity. The programme is designed to secure some 40 protected areas and increase the present protected area network from 14 to 17 percent of the national land area.

Illegal logging and an underdeveloped infrastructure threaten Cameroon's forests. As a solution, the programme calls for working alongside forest companies to develop management plans and a demand for certified, environmentally friendly products. Employing 12 000 people, the forest sector is Cameroon's largest private employer and the second largest source of export revenue after oil. However, forest sector employment has dropped in recent years, so funds will also be used to re-establish two national forestry schools to train the new recruits.

WWF sees this agreement as a concrete example of the commitment expressed by the region's heads of state at the Brazzaville summit in February 2005 and looks to other nations to follow the lead of France and Cameroon. [Source: WWF, 26 June 2006.]

SAVING LANGUAGES TO SAVE SPECIES

Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity in Brazil have set themselves the ambitious target of slowing down the rate of species loss by 2010.

In a recent article, Ehsan Masood argues that conserving biodiversity goes hand in hand with saving the world's endangered languages. Indigenous communities in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific often have detailed knowledge of their local flora and fauna that they express only in their native languages.

Masood says that if we wish to use this knowledge to protect and exploit biodiversity in a sustainable way, then endangered languages must also be protected. He points out that threatened languages and species are often found in the same places. According to UNESCO, for instance, a quarter of the world's languages are spoken in two of the world's most species-rich countries: Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. [Source: OpenDemocracy.Net, 3 April 2006 [in SciDev.Net].] ♣