IUCN Statement – HLPF General Debate

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Nature is in crisis.

From coral reefs, to rainforests, to insects and microbes, much of our web of life is disappearing at rates not seen in millions of years. As recent assessments from the IPCC and IPBES have made clear, the continued deterioration of species and ecosystems will have significant repercussions for nature and people. The greatest impacts will be visited upon the most vulnerable, who depend upon nature directly for their livelihoods. And the continued loss of biodiversity will undermine our efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda.

However, this is not a message of despair, but a call to action.

This past week, many delegations have highlighted the role that nature-based solutions can play in development planning and tackling climate change. We have seen the potential locally; here in New York, wetlands avoided over $600 million in damages from Hurricane Sandy. And the global potential is massive. Earlier this month, researchers found that, by storing carbon, global forest restoration could be “our most effective climate change solution to date.”

We also want to underscore that nature touches on all of the SDGs, even those that do not directly pertain to the natural world.

In education, outdoor play in children has been linked to the development of core skills, as well as social and emotional learning.

In economic development, ecosystems are valuable assets contributing to, rather than constraining, development plans and projects.
In inequality, IUCN works with indigenous peoples and local communities to ensure that natural resource rights are respected, and that benefits resulting from their use are shared inclusively and equitably.

In governance, effective and just institutions are central to tackling environmental challenges, including landscape degradation and climate change.

And of course, strong partnerships and cooperation are essential to conserve ecosystems and the services they provide.

Despite some progress in expanding natural habitats, the Secretary-General reports that “biodiversity loss is occurring at an alarming rate.” Most 2020 targets in the SDGs are unlikely to be met, so we must ensure that we accelerate efforts on biodiversity in the coming decade.

2020 will be a watershed year. Before the Convention on Biological Diversity COP in China, IUCN will hold our World Conservation Congress in Marseille in June, immediately following the 2nd UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon.

Then, in September, Heads of State and Government will convene at a Leaders’ Biodiversity Summit in New York. This offers an occasion to send a message from the highest levels that we are committed to conserving nature as a basis for achieving the SDGs by 2030. This will be an extraordinary opportunity to build upon the momentum established during these past four years, as we move into a new decade, to change the world for the better.

Thank you.