



# Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

Secretariat provided by the United Nations Environment Programme



## Congo Basin Forest Partnership Meeting,

*Speech by Robert Hepworth, Executive Secretary of UNEP Convention on Migratory Species  
on the opening of the New Gorilla Agreement for Signature  
Paris, 26 October 2007*

- Why an Agreement (mini-Treaty) for Gorillas?
- A distinguished Global Environmental Leader asked me - not long after I moved from the UNEP Headquarters to become Executive Secretary of the Convention on Migratory Species - this rhetorical question:  
  
“Surely we cannot save the planet species by species?”
- Well perhaps not? Or perhaps yes! If we first see humans as a species, albeit a special and perhaps sacred one, one can see the planet through that lens.
- Focus comes from seeing the entire aggregate of species - in other words life on Planet Earth - as a whole, an inseparable whole. The web of life, the web of species, on which our species' future depends, already faced daunting challenges before the full realisation of the mounting crisis from global warming.
- The action we need to take to support human development, and especially providing decent conditions for the poor majority of the world, are as a whole consistent with conserving species, managing forests and other habitats on which they survive, and reducing carbon emissions. Of course at micro-level there are conflicts between environmental and development objectives, but overall these twin pillars can and must be reconciled.
- Partnerships are now a crucial tool to carry out integrated programmes for environment and sustainable development. We live in a world driven by global markets. They generate substantial resources. Partnerships bring together the private sector, voluntary bodies and Governments, all of whom ultimately depend on these resources. Together they can change the world - but individually they are much weaker.
- “Flagship” or keystone species like gorillas are a catalyst for much wider objectives, both for human development as well as wildlife conservation. They are also a flag around which Governments, the private and voluntary sectors can rally support, especially for urgent programmes.
- I was one of the founders of GRASP during my time at UNEP. Under my successors it now has grown to a network of over 80 Partners, with a throughput of over \$6 million. It needs much more - \$30 million at least, according to “Plan It for the Apes”. There were encouraging signals at the GRASP Donors Meeting yesterday.

- GRASP will be the key agent in implementing the new legal treaty under CMS for gorillas which we are so proud to open for signature in Paris today. The Gorilla Agreement's programme will be fully integrated within GRASP.
- The new Agreement also explicitly includes provisions on co-operation with the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP) which is by far the best-funded agency working to conserve and manage the forests on which Gorillas and local people depend. It is vital that we now use the Gorilla mini-treaty which almost all the Range States negotiated earlier this week, alongside GRASP, to support the successful conservation and management of the forests of the Congo region, and indeed habitats in the other Range States beyond the Congo Basin.
- A crucial element of the new Agreement is that it is *legally-binding*. Nowadays such instruments are used *very* selectively in wildlife conservation. Agreeing a mini-treaty for gorillas is intended to send a signal of the importance of these species and their ecosystems, and the need to halt and in future avoid civil conflicts which threaten the lives of gorillas, and local communities. I would like to pay tribute to the courageous work of Park Wardens and Rangers in DRC, some of whom have already given their lives to protect the forests and their wildlife.
- In an important sense, this treaty is for them - the local guardians of the forest on whose bravery almost everything else we want to achieve will depend.
- So, to sum up: We have GRASP mobilizing a grand alliance of Governments and civil society to "Plan It for the Apes". We have the Congo Basin Forest Partnership mobilizing resources for forests and the millions of many poor people who depend on them. We have other key actors such as COMEFAC fully engaged. We have outstanding examples in Uganda and Rwanda of how Gorilla tourism can help local communities to become self-sufficient. We have a new report from UNEP today about responding to the environmental causes and consequences of the current conflict in DRC particularly by developing new and greener energy to reduce demand for fuel from the forest where gorillas and many other endangered animals and plants live. We have a clear understanding of how important - and relatively cheap - the conservation of existing forests can be in creating a carbon-neutral planet. We have a new intervention by HRH the Prince of Wales – the Prince's Rainforest Project launched yesterday in London.
- Now the Convention on Migratory Species has joined forces with gorilla Range States and France to negotiate a new "Treaty for the Apes" in record time - 3 days of concentrated negotiations. I hope that all 10 Range States will be able to create a further record by [signing and] ratifying the Agreement so it can come into force next year.
- Five countries have already signed the Final Act confirming the text of the new Agreement – Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Uganda and the Republic of Congo. A 6<sup>th</sup> State – e.g. Guinea – will sign in a few minutes time. It is unusual for any country to sign the Treaty itself only 2 days after the text was agreed so we are very pleased that the Republic of Congo Brazzaville and the Central African Republic are able to sign the Treaty itself.

- We are also inviting all Governments and observers to sign a declaration based exactly on the text of the agreement as a signal of their commitment to gorilla conservation. There is also the Forests Now Declaration which will be available for signature separately.
- We have to use this unparalleled opportunity to weave the strands represented by these key objectives into a robust cloth which will allow humans and the gorillas, as our closest relatives, to live in harmony and peace.

I finish with some words of thanks:

- To the countries and organisations who made the Gorilla negotiation possible through funds – the Governments of Belgium, France, Monaco and United Kingdom, and the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums.
- Then to the French authorities as a whole for making this week of “Paris Primates” possible and without whom there would have been no Gorilla treaty this week.
- Above all to the committed and instinctively internationalist delegates of the African countries at this week's negotiations, who made me so proud of my own African connections. *You are the future!*