



Statement on behalf of

**Robert Hepworth
Executive Secretary**

**of the Convention on Migratory Species of Wild
Animals (CMS)**

to the

**First Meeting of the Signatories to the
Memorandum of Understanding concerning
Conservation, Restoration and Sustainable Use of
the Saiga Antelope (*Saiga tatarica tatarica*)**

Almaty, Kazakhstan, 25-26 September 2006

Dear Delegates and Other Participants,

I salute you all for attending this historic meeting in Kazakhstan, which we all hope will be a milestone on the road to recovery for the Saiga antelope.

This remarkable species has been a casualty of the economic instability which followed the disbandment of the Soviet Union in 1991. The dramatic collapse in saiga populations through poaching for horn and meat is a vivid example of short-term human necessity – indeed desperation – overwhelming longer term conservation and sustainable management. Two conventions administered by UNEP – the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) – have joined forces to support action by range states, consumer states, IUCN and NGO partners aimed at reversing the downward trend in saiga hunters and restoring sustainable populations throughout their range.

My colleagues in CITES have taken exemplary steps to address the problem of illegal trade whilst the Convention on Migratory Species has focused on negotiating and implementing a regional Agreement (MoU) under Article IV of CMS, and an integral Action Plan for saiga conservation in which all the key actors have an important role to play.

We hope the technical workshop and MoU meeting, which together comprise the largest ever assembly of saiga experts, will establish more accurate information on the conservation status of saiga, and agree priorities for an international work programme to carry out the Action Plan effectively. We look for further strong support from donor bodies, including the European Commission, the UN Development Programme and the Government of Germany, whilst thanking them for their previous donations which have made these meetings possible.

We thank Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan for being the first two range states to sign the Saiga Agreement. We thank Kazakhstan not only for working with the two Secretariats to host the meetings, but also for their undertaking to sign it this week, providing the magic third signature which will bring the Agreement into force. We thank China, Mongolia and Russia for their participation. UNEP/CMS is currently discussing the possibility of accession to our Convention with the Government of China; we hope that the Saiga Agreement - and this week's meetings – will send a positive signal to that process. We also thank our other partners, including IUCN, CIC, WAZA and WCS for their key contributions.

Best wishes

Robert Hepworth
Executive Secretary
UNEP/CMS

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