# IUCN at UNGA 81

## *What is UNGA 81?*

UNGA81 refers to the 81st session of the United Nations General Assembly — the annual cycle of the UN's main deliberative body, running from September 2026 through September 2027. Each session is numbered sequentially since the UN's founding in 1945, and each has its own elected President who presides over proceedings, sets a thematic priority, and shapes the agenda for that year's high-level engagements.

H.E. Dr. Khalilur Rahman of Bangladesh is President-elect of the 81st session, elected on 2 June 2026. He formally takes office when the session opens on 8 September 2026, under the theme "*Restoring trust, managing transformation: A United Nations that delivers for all*". The session's centrepiece is High-Level Week, opening with the General Debate on 22 September — the annual gathering where Heads of State and Government deliver national statements — running through 28th September. Around and within that week sits a cluster of mandated high-level meetings (on sea-level rise, pandemic preparedness, the Durban Declaration anniversary, and others), each addressing a specific thematic priority under the broader UNGA81 umbrella.

For IUCN, the main point of engagement in this year's formal UN calendar is the High-Level Meeting on Sea-Level Rise on 24 September — one of the mandated meetings sitting inside High-Level Week. As in past years, New York Climate Week runs concurrently, giving IUCN's team additional venues for side events, bilaterals, and advocacy alongside the formal UN proceedings.

## *What kinds of activities will take place in New York during UNGA 81?*

The IUCN delegation taking part in the different segments of UNGA81 will include the IUCN President, the Regional Director for North America, the Permanent Observer of IUCN to the UN and other supporting staff members.

The main part of the UN HLW is the **opening of the 81st session of the General Debate on September 22.** As an Observer to the United Nations, IUCN cannot make a statement in the general debate but will be present at the opening. In parallel, Climate Week NYC will take place. Climate Week brings together over 900 events and activities across the City of New York. It brings together business leaders, decision-makers and civil society representatives from a wide variety of backgrounds, and from all over the world, to drive the transition, speed up progress, and champion change. The gathering in New York will feature several side-events and speaking opportunities where IUCN will be able to *be the voice of nature* and to further raise awareness about its comprehensive portfolio.

For IUCN, key events for this year, which will include a speaking role for an IUCN delegate, events we are co-organizing, or High Level events that we are attending include the following:

| Date | Event |
|---|---|
| **Fri, 18 Sep**<br>**10:00 – 13:00** | **SDG Moment**<br>The SDG Moment is an annual event convened by the UN Secretary-General at the opening of UNGA High-Level Week, mandated under General Assembly resolution 74/4. It serves as the flagship gathering for spotlighting progress, momentum, and political attention on the Sustainable Development Goals, bringing together Heads of State and Government, UN officials, civil society, and private-sector leaders at the very start of the high-level segment. |
| **Mon 21 Sep**<br>**15:00 - 16:15** | **Sounds Right -- Nature's Growth fund**<br>Session on the Sounds Right initiative and its growth: welcome and progress recap (500M+ streams, 30M+ listeners, $1.2M+ raised for frontline conservation, Cannes Lions Grand Prix), and announcing Nature's Growth Fund. |
| **Mon 21 Sep**<br>**16:00 - 17:30** | **Plastic Odyssey Fund — "Oceans Awaken," Episode IV**<br>Advocacy & Policy Panel: "The Undiscovered Treaty". Panel on negotiating the future of the UN Plastics Treaty, Extended Producer Responsibility, and the transition away from fossil fuels — including regional implementation paths forward. |
| **Tue 22 Sep**<br>**09:00** | **Opening of the General debate of the 81st session of the UN General Assembly** |
| **Tue 22 Sep**<br>**11:30 – 13:30** | TNC Danone New York Climate Week Event on **Water Policy for Nature-Based Solutions** |
| **Tue 22 Sep**<br>**11:30 – 1:30** | **Forestry Policy Lab: Incubating State-Level Climate Solutions**,<br>It will convene a small group of state legislators, forest managers, and nature-based solutions practitioners to discuss best practices for advancing climate-smart forestry solutions in 2027 and beyond. Hosted by the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators. |
| **Tue 22 Sep**<br>**10:00 - 11:30** | **National Geographic Society and The Nature Conservancy Closed Door Side Event**<br>at the Doris Duke Foundation's Treehouse Venue. |
| **Tue 22 Sep**<br>**17:30 - 20:30** | **The Briefing: AI for Global Benefit**, hosted by Anthropic.<br>Invite only, bringing together a select group of partners and leaders to discuss the progress, challenges, and opportunities in ensuring the benefits of AI are realized globally. |
| **Wed 23 Sep**<br>**11:30 - 12:30** | **What will it take to be ready? A durable transition plan for 2029**<br>Closed door session hosted by Access Granted Group, the Aspen Institute's Energy and Environment Program, and Ground Shift, who are convening a carefully selected group of 30–35 people across conservation, environmental justice, Indigenous leadership, policy, philanthropy, and constituency-building working on a plan to guide the next presidential transition. |
| **Wed 23 Sep**<br>**11:30 – 13:30** | **Catalyzing Collective Action for Global Groundwater Resilience**<br>Side event co-hosted by IUCN, EDF and IWMI |

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| **Wed 23 Sep**<br>**12:00 - 15:30** | **Financing Climate Resilience for Households and MSEs: From Early Warnings to Early Action**<br>Co-hosted by the Center for Financial Inclusion (CFI) and the Cornell Atkinson Center for Sustainability |
| **Wed 23 Sep**<br>**17:00 - 19:00** | **Nasdaq's NY Climate Week Forum** |
| **Thu, 24 Sep**<br>**09:00 – 18:00** | **UN High-level Meeting on existential threats posed by sea level rise** |
| **Thu 24 Sep**<br>**09:30 - 12:30** | **The Science Needed to Link Landscape Action with Commodity Resilience**<br>An invitation-only workshop hosted by Conservation International and Procter & Gamble during Climate Week NYC Commodity supply chain disruptions impact local and global economies and are expected to grow in frequency and severity. Habitat conversion, climate change, and degradation of key natural resources reduce natural buffers and commodity supply chains are becoming more vulnerable. Yet the connection between conservation actions and resilient supply is not sufficiently quantified to continue building a strong case for investment in nature-based solutions. |
| **Thu 24 Sep**<br>**10:00 – 11:30** | "**United for Water: A Call for Collective Action**"<br>Ministerial High-level event hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Republic of Senegal. |
| **Thu 24 Sep**<br>**15:00 - 18:00** | **The Conservation Finance Alliance Incubator and private investment in nature**<br>Hosted by Conservation Finance Alliance (CFA) and Coalition for Private Investment in Conservation (CPIC) |
| **Thu 24 Sep**<br>**14.00 – 15:30** | **Advancing International Cooperation against Environmental Crime: The Opportunity of UNTOC COP13.**<br>High Level event organized by WCS and Brazil. |
| **Thu 24 Sep**<br>**Time and location TBC** | **High-Level Event from the COP30 and COP31 Presidencies on Accelerating Ocean-Based Climate Solutions through the Ocean Action Agenda** |
| **Fri 25 Sep**<br>**9am – 6pm** | **UN High-level Meeting on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response** |

## *IUCN policy priorities*

Our engagement this year focuses on four central themes: oceans, water, the 2030 Agenda, and nature finance. Environmental cooperation is a tangible way to show that international cooperation works, and if done right, leads to improved outcomes for people and communities. A predictable international rules-based order provides the stability needed for long-term environmental planning. Examples of successes of the multilateral system include milestones such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the BBNJ Agreement, and progress made under the Plastics Treaty negotiations.

Sea-level rise, freshwater stress and ocean degradation are three expressions of a single destabilized water cycle. As the 2030 Agenda enters its final years and Member States begin shaping what comes next, IUCN's core message is that water in its frozen, flowing, coastal and marine forms cannot remain the connective tissue everyone assumes someone else is governing. High-Level Week 2026 is the moment to anchor water and coastal-ocean resilience both in the sea-level rise declaration and in the architecture of a framework beyond 2030.

Nature finance is the fourth theme because it is the mechanism that turns political commitment into implementation. The ambition captured in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the BBNJ Agreement and the emerging Plastics Treaty will not be realized without a predictable step-change in finance flows — public and private, grant-based and blended — aligned behind clear, measurable outcomes. IUCN's message at HLW 2026 is that finance cannot be treated as a downstream technical detail bolted onto negotiated text: it needs to be built into the design of any framework emerging from this session, including mechanisms for tracking, mobilizing and aligning resources behind water, ocean and biodiversity outcomes alike.

For more information, please contact:
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