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Keynote address of IUCN for the Big Win for Dinaric Arc ceremony 2 December 2013, Budva, Montenegro

Your Excellency,
President Vujanović,
Minister Gvozdenović,
Commissioner Potočnik,
Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am excited to see this ceremony taking place today in Budva, after several months of intense and painstaking work on elaborating the Big Win Joint Statement and nature conservation commitments. It's a great day for the region, setting a new agenda for protected areas and nature conservation. I am proud that IUCN was able to join this effort and, together with WWF, draw the necessary resources to support you in making it happen. It is at the very core of IUCN's mission to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature. We look forward to working together on implementing agreed goals.

It gives me great pleasure to convey a message on behalf of Ms Julia Marton-Lefèvre, Director General of IUCN, who is unfortunately unable to be with us, as she is, today in Botswana, at a Summit on the African Elephant crisis.

Allow me first to congratulate the Government of Montenegro for convening such an important regional event on nature conservation. It is a milestone achievement for a region so rich in biodiversity and natural resources, continuously delivering a broad range of goods and services to communities. Very few regions in Europe are so abundant in natural resources and enjoy such a high diversity of species and habitats. It is no surprise therefore that there is an increasing trend in investing in development projects aimed at harnessing the benefits that nature provides to us. What worries us however is that these developments often target some of the most valuable natural areas across the region, thus reducing the capacity of nature to deliver services in the long run. More than ever we need to speak a common language and set clear conservation goals if we are to effectively address the growing environmental challenges. We need firm commitments in order to be able to secure necessary resources and achieve our common goals. A sustainable future for the region is the only way forward which will enable the long-term conservation of the region's rich biodiversity and provide for the economic security and well-being of societies and communities. IUCN strongly advocates for nature-based solutions as a science-based and cost-effective way of tackling some of the most pressing environmental threats the world and the region are facing today.

Therefore, we are pleased to hear about commitments such as strengthened nature conservation systems, new and more effective protected areas with improved management, effective implementation of relevant EU policies, improved cross-border and cross-sectoral cooperation as well as an increased recognition of the natural capital concept. All this makes a good case and a strong argument for nature conservation. Achieving these goals requires new and additional human and financial resources. Not only do the countries have a mandate to do so at the national level, our joint task is to work together in order to effectively contribute to the international goals set out in the CBD's Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the EU 2020 Biodiversity Strategy. Proper translation of global and regional policies into effective action at the national and local level is our common goal and a guarantee for the long-term success of our conservation efforts. Today's Joint Statement lays solid ground for that.

IUCN stands ready to contribute to this agenda by providing advice and support drawing upon its science-based approach and vast expert networks. Our aim is to put particular emphasis on system-level planning and regional cooperation which will further enable us to set shared goals and work on issues of common interest. South-Eastern Europe is a diverse region with a number of shared natural resources which all require a joint vision and effective transboundary cooperation. If implemented successfully, this will no doubt add to the quality and impact of our efforts. IUCN looks forward to seeing an even stronger interaction between authorities responsible for nature conservation in the region. IUCN's new strategy for South-Eastern Europe provides a solid basis for our work in the region which, backed by the Big Win Joint Statement, clearly defines priorities and sets a precise framework for all of us. We believe that, together with WWF and other partners, we will be able to properly assist you in accomplishing your conservation agenda.

I wish you all a very successful event and conference.

Thank you.

Boris Erg, Director
IUCN Programme Office for South-Eastern Europe