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## **Speech Dr. Robert Mather Head of Southeast Asia Group, IUCN**

**IUCN - Marriott MOU Signing an Press Conference  
19<sup>th</sup> September 2013, Renaissance Hotel**

It has often been said that if we were to rank the world's hundred largest economies in order of size, more than 50 of them would be companies rather than countries. This fact alone tells us that in working towards a world in which the importance of nature is truly recognized, a world in which people value and take care of nature in their daily lives, then private companies have a major role to play.

That is why IUCN, the world's largest global environmental actively seeks out opportunities to engage with business and industry in a strategic way to promote nature-based solutions addressing both social and environmental issues together in an holistic integrated manner, to achieve clear environmental and social outcomes. Some recent examples of our work with the private sector in Asia include work with Holcim Cement in a number of countries including Viet Nam, and this has included company-wide biodiversity action plans, developing best practices in restoration of disused quarries, and establishment of new nature reserves. With Tata Steel we are working on best practices in biodiversity conservation in the mining sector in India, and have helped them with stakeholder consultations for Environmental and Health Impact Assessments in Thailand. With Dilmah Tea in Sri Lanka we have worked together to improve biodiversity conservation in tea estates, and to establish a National Business and Biodiversity platform to engage a wide range of companies across different sectors.

The hospitality industry is a major economic sector, employing over 200 million people worldwide and growing at more than 4% each year, and Marriott is a well-know major global brand, with over 140 hotels throughout Asia, a number that is expected to double to 300 over the next few years, including strong growth in Thailand. IUCN sees a number of different entry points for Marriott to become a force for positive environmental and social change including through hotel operations and supply chain interventions.

That is why I am very happy that the partnership being launched today goes far beyond the standard activities of water and energy saving that most hotels adopt these days, in favour of a more wide-ranging approach. The basic underlying premise is that hotels are strategic long-term investments that will continue to be a feature of the landscapes and seascapes in which they are located, for many decades to come. They become effectively a part of that place. Local people employed in hotels as well as staff brought in from elsewhere, need to develop a shared understanding of that place and the many ways in which their hotel, and their individual actions can create added benefits for local communities and environments.

In this context, we are starting with three main areas of positive change:

- Raising funds to support local community replanting and management of their mangroves and other coastal forests
- Establishing small community businesses, such as for production of welcome gifts for guests
- Sourcing sustainably produced food items from local communities for Marriott restaurants

Mangroves are immensely important for a whole variety of reasons including protection from extreme weather events, food security, carbon sequestration and biodiversity conservation, as well as tourism and recreation. IUCN launched its Flagship “Mangroves for the Future” programme in response to the Asian Tsunami with the symbolic planting of a mangrove tree in Phuket by former US President Bill Clinton in 2006.

This morning we are signing an MoU to mark the official start of collaboration between IUCN and Marriott Hotels in Thailand, and we are also opening a small mangrove garden education exhibit, here at the Renaissance as a source of information and inspiration for associates and visitors alike, and as a permanent reminder of our collaboration.

This afternoon and tomorrow we will have the first tree planting activities at Bang Krachao, a symbolic start to this exciting new partnership. I am personally very much looking forward to building this collaboration over the coming years, and I hope that in the near future this model developed in Thailand can be replicated across the region, and who knows, eventually even globally!

END.