

**Maurice Strong Environmental Dialogue  
1 July 2009 - Gland, Switzerland  
Dinner remarks**

**Julia Marton-Lefèvre  
Director General, IUCN**

We had a good and fruitful day looking at serious issues and making serious suggestions on how to save our planet. Tonight we are here to celebrate the birthday of a man who has been a friend and a mentor to all of us gathered here, and whose life has touched nearly every life on this planet.

It is a coincidence that we happen to celebrate our distinguished Canadian on Canada Day, and also a coincidence that our gracious host at this lovely place is also a Canadian -- Margot Bennet Mathisson. Margot thank you for your generosity, for your friendship and for your support to IUCN.

While some people may distinguish themselves by their talent, by their dedication Or by their accomplishments, others have had a combination of experiences and influence that make them literally larger than life.

Our guest of honour – and dear, dear friend – Maurice Strong is just that – larger than life.

The list of his accomplishments and contributions to our well-being is too long to enumerate here. Let's just say that the day Hollywood starts looking for someone to convey the sense that one person can change the world – Maurice Strong would provide more material than even the most gifted script-writer could hope for!

Having discovered the importance of education and experience very young, Maurice is at once a successful businessman, a seasoned diplomat, a development expert, and the true father of the modern environment movement.

So much has changed since the beginning of that movement. We know that we still have a very long way to go, but it's encouraging when the issues we care so much about are on the front pages every day.

You all know how instrumental Maurice has been in getting us here. Think of Stockholm, think of the creation of UNEP, think of Rio – all of which have put environmental concerns “on the map” for people who previously thought it was the domain of inoffensive birdwatchers or nature lovers.

I began by saying that I won't list all of Maurice's accomplishments, and that is why you didn't hear me mention CIDA, IDRC, the Earth Council, Earth Charter, University for Peace, the World Bank, the UN, and so many other organizations and movements that owe so much to Maurice; nor did I list his countless

honorary diplomas and decorations. It may not surprise you if I tell you that Maurice has been much involved in various aspects of IUCN's work, and has even come to our rescue more than once in our 60 year history.

How could one man do so much and remain so humble, so down-to-earth?

Dear friends, there is a quote from Maurice that pops up on the Internet quite often. It goes like this: "Don't accept that you can't make a difference".

Maurice, your life is the living proof that this quote is right. Your knowledge, love and respect of different cultures, from the Great North to the villages of Africa, India or China; your ability to move from tribal huts to presidential palaces, from boardrooms to the UN, from the highest levels of academia to grassroots NGOs; and your never-ending drive to change things for the better are the proof that an individual can make a difference. You are a constant source of inspiration for all of us.

In some cultures an 80<sup>th</sup> birthday is particularly honoured – it is said that 80 years represents 10,000 full moons. I expect that many of us will be with you to celebrate more full moons, and your friends will continue to organize other Maurice Strong Environmental Dialogues; so this is just the first of many with this special group of people who don't accept that they can't make a difference. And thanks to you, I believe there are many more of us out there than even you may realize.

And now ladies and gentlemen, let us hear from Maurice Strong.

....