

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

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

Good morning and a very warm welcome to IUCN's Headquarters. If this meeting were taking place a year from now we would welcome you in our new building which you have surely seen – these two buildings will be our new Conservation campus, for IUCN staff and partners. The new building, to be joined to this one, will be one of the greenest buildings in Europe.

But, this year is such an important one for all of us, that we couldn't wait for the construction to be finished. I think you must have had the same feeling, Maurice Strong, when you organized that important meeting in Founex, just down the lake from here, in 1971, just before the Stockholm Conference.

For us, for all of us, this is a crucial and pivotal year. We have to seal to deal, or at least make real and solid progress, in Copenhagen in December, and we have to ensure that by 2010, the International Year of Biodiversity, everyone understands the importance of nature, our life support system.

And of course 2009 happens to be the 80th birthday of Maurice Strong, who has touched so many lives – all of ours in this room, and thousands of others, with his incredible vision and foresight both about the challenges we face and the solutions that we must put in place.

Maurice did not want a birthday party, but rather a chance to meet and discuss key issues with those who have been with him on the journey that has brought us to this pivotal year. In this room therefore we have many who contributed significantly to that journey which began, nearly 40 years ago, as well as those who have joined along the way and who will carry the torch into the future. In fact tomorrow, a group of next generation leaders will join us to give us their message and vision.

We will celebrate Maurice Strong in style and with optimism this evening, and now we will roll up our sleeves, as he wants us to do, and examine the major issues that will make or break our planet Earth and our civilization as we know it.

We have a programme which many of you helped design, and we expect great things from you. The results of this meeting will be shared with our members and partners, and will help us achieve our goals in 2009, 2010 and beyond.

Our first speaker will be IUCN's new President, and an old friend to many of us, Ashok Khosla.

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