



**UN Commission on Sustainable Development
17th session, High-Level Segment**

**Speech by Julia Marton-Lefèvre
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Madame Chairperson, Mr. Secretary General, Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am glad to be here at these important discussions and am honoured to have been invited to bring you a message from the environmental community that IUCN represents. IUCN has long recognised that our mission of conserving nature for future generations means nothing if it is not contributing to a sustainable and dignified life for all human beings, living in harmony with nature. You may be aware that the phrase ‘sustainable development’ was first coined by IUCN in our 1980 *World Conservation Strategy*, written in partnership with UNEP and WWF, and so I stand before you as a founding member of the sustainable development family.

At a time when CSD is considering the issues of agriculture, Africa, desertification, drought, rural development and land, the world is going through one of the worst financial crises since the Great Depression. People around the world are losing their jobs, their homes, their pensions, or worse. Governments are cobbling together enormous stimulus packages to avoid economic disaster. And apart from the financial crisis, we also have to contend with an unprecedented energy and food crisis as we prepare for this December’s meetings in Copenhagen, where tough decisions about how the global community will cope with climate change will have to be taken. We are living history on a scale as never before.

As your discussions have demonstrated, nowhere in the world are the negative effects of our unsustainable lifestyles and practices felt more strongly than in Africa. We know today that we can neither attain the Millennium Development Goals, nor effectively tackle our global environmental challenges if we continue to neglect the African continent. This means not only investing in agriculture, building infrastructure and investing in markets – however important these may be. It requires a much more concerted effort to integrate Africa into world trade and a significant boost in development aid to the African continent. Looking forward to CSD 18 & 19, we already, in this cycle, need to pay particular attention to the issue of sustainable consumption and production and the impact thereof on developing countries such as those in Africa.

As the financial stories dominate the media and the delegates here at CSD focus on the needs of people, there is a temptation to treat the environment as a less important issue. I sincerely believe this would be a serious mistake.

Why do I say this?

- **First, the ‘business as usual’ approach to solving the world’s problems has resulted in using natural resources at a scale and pace that is not sustainable;**
- **Second, the continuing increase of population, combined with social and economic inequalities are amplifying the stress we put on ecosystems and the services they provide with consequent adverse impacts on human well being; and**
- **Third, our past experiences in addressing global challenges may no longer serve our purpose because they do not include the added stress of climate change which is, literally, changing everything.**

In short, we are running out of time to reverse a series of dangerous trends. For too long, we have been taking much more than the Earth can produce -- whether we like it or not, we must now recognize that we have overdrawn our account of natural assets, and the natural environment upon which we depend is compromised as a result. It can recuperate, but the treatment has to be real, on a massive scale, and immediate. We need to increase our investments in nature now.

What do we mean by ‘investing in nature’? We mean supporting the environment’s ability to continue to provide the billions of dollars worth of services that it has provided us for millennia –clean air and water; food, clothing and medicines; and inspiration for our cultures and spirituality. Investment in nature requires an understanding that the environment is not a separate 'sector' that should be thought of once everything else is ‘fixed’, but rather as a crucial element to address the many challenges we face today. Investing in nature is taking advantage of the interdependence of our environment, our economy and our society. Investing in nature, through ecosystem-based and landscape scale approaches to managing today’s challenges, is an effective and achievable means to decrease people’s vulnerability to drought, desertification, and food insecurity. Without investment in nature, our objectives for managing today’s sustainable development challenges of food security and poverty reduction are doomed to failure.

As the richer nations of the world work to restore their economies and manage the impacts of climate change, we cannot abandon our efforts to promote poverty reduction and sustainable development. We know that poor people will suffer the brunt of climate change – and in particular vulnerable groups such as women and the rural poor will pay the highest price. The combination of economic hardship, degraded ecosystems and climate change is a potentially explosive cocktail. If we want development assistance to do more than make misery tolerable, then environmental considerations should be at the very centre of development policies and programs. Investing in nature also makes sense in the developing world because it gives poorer people the necessary tools to adapt to a rapidly changing world.

Perhaps one of the best examples of what can be achieved by investing in nature is the proposal for REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and

Degradation). Stopping deforestation alone could avoid from 10-20% of current CO² emissions. We could capture an additional 117 Gigatonnes of CO₂ emissions by restoring the 850 million hectares of degraded forests around the world. And that additional capture could be done while also improving local livelihoods simply by using techniques such as agroforestry. Why we would pass up the opportunity to make such a difference – using available technology and capacity – is beyond imagination.

Sustainable rural development means much more than transferring new technologies to the poor corners of the world. It requires a greater emphasis on building the resilience of rural communities. This is not to say that we should not invest in technology – on the contrary. Investing in cleaner and more energy-efficient technologies and business practices is in our interest and will help our slumping economy through the kind of investments that our environment also needs.

To get us from where we are today to the “post-carbon” economy of the future, we have to take the business of investing in nature seriously. Like a healthy immune system in a human being, a healthy environment protects us from the effects of the many ills of our time.

As the governments of the world embark on financial bailout plans and finding a way to deal with climate change and our other pressing challenges, we cannot let the debates about these issues make us forget that we are running out of time very quickly. The level of commitment for change being shown by the global community to address these challenges is, in fact, an incredible opportunity to re-frame our thinking and to put our environment at the centre of the discussions.

Massive investments in nature – in the way we protect it, manage it and govern it – cannot be done alone. We will succeed only if we involve partners from all parts of society – from governments to the private sector to civil society, including indigenous peoples. IUCN has a great deal of experience doing just that. Everyone has a stake in the outcome and we must all play our part.

Finally, transforming to a “decarbonised economy” and giving the world’s most vulnerable people a fighting chance to deal with poverty, food insecurity and vulnerability in our rapidly changing world requires us to ACT NOW. We need the political will to put it in action. That, in great part, is your responsibility. You can count on us in the environmental movement to support you with all of our energy and capacity.

Thank you.