

**Regional Declaration on the Conservation of South Asia's
Critically Endangered Vulture Species**

Delhi, 4 May 2012

We, the Government Representatives taking part in the *Symposium on Developing a Regional Response to the Conservation of South Asia's Critically Endangered Vulture Species*, held in Delhi from 3-4 May 2012, hereby adopt this regional declaration:

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Government of India

Government of Nepal

Government of Pakistan

Regional Declaration on the Conservation of South Asia's Critically Endangered Vulture Species

RECALLING that vultures are specialized scavengers that provide a critically important ecosystem service by removing carcasses of livestock and wild animals, and carrion from the environment;

FURTHER RECALLING that vultures are an integral part of the cultures of South Asian countries, and play a central role in several of the region's ancient religious traditions;

RECOGNIZING that South Asia's populations of long-billed vulture (*Gyps indicus*), slender-billed vulture (*Gyps tenuirostris*) and white-rumped vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*) have declined by more than 99 per cent since the early 1990s;

NOTING that IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) has listed all three species as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List;

FURTHER NOTING that IUCN called for urgent measures to be taken to conserve these species, in Resolution 3.079 on the *Conservation of Gyps Species of Vultures in South and Southeast Asia*, adopted at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Bangkok in 2004;

RECALLING Aichi Biodiversity Target 12, which calls for all countries and stakeholders to prevent the extinction of known threatened species by 2020 and to improve the conservation status of those species most in decline;

FURTHER NOTING that these rapid declines have been caused by human activities, in particular, the use of diclofenac (a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug) in the livestock sector;

COMMENDING the important steps that have already been taken by Governments, scientific bodies, non-governmental organisations, international organisations and the private sector, including:

- The ban on veterinary diclofenac in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan;
- The establishment of conservation breeding centres in India, Nepal and Pakistan;
- The initiation of "vulture safe zones" together with safe vulture feeding sites in several countries;
- Promoting research and monitoring of the vulture population;

FURTHER COMMENDING the activities of SAVE (Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction) and its members for their notable contributions to vulture conservation in the region;

RECOGNIZING the need to intensify and significantly expand the aforesaid efforts in order to ensure the recovery of South Asia's wild vulture populations;

ALSO RECOGNIZING that there is an important need for enhanced regional collaboration, information sharing, exchange of experiences and lessons learned on conservation of vultures in South Asia;

We, the participants at the *Symposium on Developing a Regional Response to the Conservation of South Asia's Critically Endangered Vulture Species*, held in Delhi from 3-4 May 2012, hereby agree to:

1) STRENGTHEN regional cooperation, by:

- Establishing a South Asia Regional Steering Committee for Vulture Conservation;
- Taking active steps to enhance information sharing and exchange of experience among all vulture range countries, in all aspects of *in-situ* and *ex-situ* vulture conservation in South Asia;

2) STRENGTHEN vulture conservation breeding and reintroduction programmes, by:

- Ensuring rapid dissemination of information relating to successful techniques and approaches amongst all centres in the region;
- Seeking to maintain and increase the level of financial and technical support for conservation breeding received from Governments, international organizations and donors, so as to deliver the objectives for the annual production of captive-bred young;
- Planning and implementing the necessary measures required at release sites;

3) CREATE AND MAINTAIN a non-toxic environment for vultures, by:

- Removing diclofenac and other toxic NSAIDs completely from the vulture food chain, through measures including enhanced enforcement of the ban on veterinary use of diclofenac and eliminating its “leakage” from human use by urgent measures and legislation, as appropriate, against multi-dose vials of human diclofenac;
- Identifying and preventing the veterinary use of other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs with similar toxicity to vultures as diclofenac, such as ketoprofen and aceclofenac (a pro-drug of diclofenac);
- Continuing efforts to identify, promote and adopt safe alternatives to diclofenac, such as meloxicam;
- Monitoring and assessing the impacts and effects of other livestock drugs on vultures, leading to active steps for preventing use of the drugs that have negative impact on vultures;
- Fully enforcing the legal ban on the manufacture of veterinary formulations, retail sale and use for veterinary purposes of diclofenac;

4) STRENGTHEN *in-situ* conservation measures, by:

- Increasing the number, size and effectiveness of national “vulture safe zones”, within which special efforts are made to remove all toxic veterinary drugs from the food chain of vultures;

- Cooperating to create trans-boundary vulture safe zones, knowing that political borders do not stop vultures from crossing international borders while searching for food;
- Enhancing the protection and management of vulture habitats and vulture roosting and nesting sites;

5) CONTINUE AND EXPAND strategically-designed awareness and advocacy campaigns, aimed at building support for vulture conservation amongst all stakeholders at local, national, regional and international levels;

6) STRENGTHEN monitoring and research, by:

- Continuing and expanding efforts to monitor vulture populations and breeding success on a regular and repeatable basis using road transect surveys and nest monitoring;
- Continuing and expanding efforts to monitor and quantify diclofenac and other toxic drugs in cattle¹ carcasses;
- Determining the safety and toxicity of veterinary NSAIDs, if necessary by experiments on captive vultures;
- Promoting studies on all possible causes of decline of wild vulture populations;
- Promoting studies on vulture behaviour and ecology;

7) CONTINUE to develop and foster active partnerships amongst Governments, research institutions, civil society, private sector and international organisations to further accelerate vulture conservation in the region.

¹ Refers to all domesticated ungulates.