



Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

Secretariat provided by the United Nations Environment Programme



PRESS RELEASE

GORILLAS – Gentle Giants in Need: International Experts Issue Frankfurt Declaration to Call for Better Protection of Gorillas

Frankfurt/Bonn, 10 June 2008 - Under the title 'Gentle Giants in need' 160 government officials, experts, corporate representatives and conservationists from 20 countries attended a conference in Frankfurt, 9-10 June to mark the UN Year of the Gorilla, a global campaign to help implement the gorilla agreement. In the "Frankfurt Declaration" they highlighted major threats to gorillas and their habitats, as well as the strategies available for the conservation of the second closest relative to humankind.

In the Declaration delegates appeal to governments, the international community and industrial companies to enhance activities to reduce threats to the remaining gorilla populations in the wild, which can contribute to peace-making and prosperity in Central Africa.

Although gorillas are protected by law in every one of the ten African range states, they are hunted for their meat, which is sold at local markets and abroad. Enforcement of wildlife laws is necessary to control the bushmeat trade. 1 million tons of bushmeat is harvested every year in the Congo Basin alone. The Frankfurt Declaration calls upon the international community and national authorities to enforce laws regulating the taking and trading of gorillas, including the wider bushmeat trade.

Diseases are also a major threat to gorillas, in particular the ebola virus, which can also pass from gorillas to humans. A large numbers of other diseases can be transmitted from humans to gorillas during close contacts. It is therefore particularly important to enforce strict health regulations in all sites where ecotourism is organized.

Natural resource exploitation can be accelerated by armed conflict, especially when affected local people depend on these resources for food, shelter and income. As a result, addressing mining and other exploitation of natural resources such as coltan, uranium and gold as a major cause for armed conflicts, is central to peace keeping missions and development in the region.

Second only to elephants, gorillas by dispersing seeds play a key role in maintaining the African rainforests and hence the world's climate. Conserving forests does not only contribute to preserving ecosystems but also underpins efforts to mitigate climate change, reduces poverty and ensures a sustainable supply of energy. Expanding human settlements and commercial exploitation of forests increases the demand for energy resources. Experts are calling for a comprehensive approach to reducing deforestation along the entire value chain of wood for energy, in which the forestry industry should play a pivotal role. The protection of biodiversity and climate change, poverty alleviation as well as sustainable use of natural resources are closely interlinked. Forests inhabited by gorillas provide ecosystem services and livelihoods to local communities.

Given the huge complexity of the interactions, scientists advocate a comprehensive approach to be undertaken by governments, the scientific community and the industrial companies operating in the Congo Basin to protect forests within their management plans.

Ian Redmond, Ambassador of the UN Year of the Gorilla, said: "The Frankfurt Declaration is an important statement of common purpose and good intent. Its success will depend on the signatories to commit to their pledges."

Gorillas and their habitats have the potential to support post-conflict reconstruction efforts and advance long-term regional economic development through ecotourism. A gorilla can generate indirectly US\$ 4 million during its life time. In Rwanda and Uganda tourism has developed into the leading contributor to the national economy exceeding the tea and coffee exports.

Serapio Rukundo, Ugandan Minister for Tourism said: “The total revenue of Bwindi and Mgahinga National Parks increased by almost 80% between 2005 and 2008. In addition to providing a boost to the national economy, gorilla tracking can even support wildlife conservation in other Protected Areas.”

Robert Hepworth, Executive Secretary of the Secretariat of the Bonn Convention (UNEP/CMS) said: “We must use all the means at our disposal to halt threats to gorillas and preserve forests as carbon sinks. Local communities need our support as guardians of these animals using revenues from gorilla tours. Following the focus on the conservation of mountain gorillas preventing them from extinction, we need to expand this approach to the lowland gorillas and to other migratory animals. “

The conference has been held to mark the UN Year of the Gorilla and the 30th Anniversary of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals. Co-organisers include the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, the Frankfurt Zoological Society and Frankfurt Zoo.

Notes to Editors

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (UNEP / CMS or Bonn Convention) develops inter-governmental agreements and action plans for the protection of endangered migratory animals and ensures its implementation. In June 2008, the international CMS Agreement on the Conservation of Gorillas and their Habitats entered into force. It provides a legal framework that will reinforce and integrate conservation efforts and has been signed by six of the ten gorilla range states so far.

Supporting the implementation of the Gorilla Agreement is the overarching goal of the Year of the Gorilla 2009. Together with its partners, the UNEP / UNESCO Partnership for the survival of great apes (GRASP) and the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA), the Bonn Convention 2009 at year of the gorilla says.

The Year of the Gorilla (YoG) is a joint initiative of the UNEP-CMS, the UNEP/UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's Great Ape Survival Partnership (GRASP) and the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA). CMS has 110 governments supporting as Parties.

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UN Year of the Gorilla: www.yog2009.org

Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (UNEP/CMS)
www.cms.int