



## Navigating Island Earth The Hawai'i Commitments

Over ten thousand leaders from government, civil society, indigenous communities, faith and spiritual traditions, the private sector, and academia gathered in an historically important meeting in Hawai'i, from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> of September, 2016.

The theme of this IUCN World Conservation Congress was 'Planet at the Crossroads' to reflect the serious choices and actions the world needs to make to reverse environmental declines and secure a healthy, livable planet.

The meeting confirmed that we have a closing window of opportunity to move to sustainability and harness nature-based solution for conservation. We need to meet the major global challenges of species loss, ecosystem decline and climate change with their profound impacts on human life and wellbeing.

Building on the Paris Agreement on climate change, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Promise of Sydney, Aichi Biodiversity Targets, the Earth Charter, and The Honolulu Challenge on Invasive Alien Species, the World Conservation Congress was a unique opportunity where different voices came together to find common ground in a spirit of partnership and collaboration.

While science continues to reveal how Earth provides the conditions essential to life and human wellbeing, all too often we do not recognize the benefits that nature provides. Through ignorance, willfulness, complacency, or corruption, we continue to degrade ecosystems and the services they provide, depleting biodiversity, as well as geodiversity, and eroding traditional biocultural relationships. An alternative approach is that nature conservation and human progress are not mutually exclusive but can be essential partners in achieving sustainable development.

We must undertake profound transformations in how human societies live on Earth, with particular attention to making our patterns of production and consumption more sustainable. We must recognize that human health and wellbeing depend on healthy ecosystems. We must recognize that every form of life has value – regardless of its worth to humans.

We are faced with tremendous forces of transformation sweeping the world, such as climate change and dramatic socioeconomic and gender inequality, and the urgent need to eradicate poverty. Delegates affirmed that there are credible and accessible political, economic, legal,



cultural and technological choices which can promote human wellbeing in ways that support, and even enhance, our planet's natural assets. The environmental rule of law is essential and needs to be cultivated and strengthened. The establishment of environment courts in more than 50 nations is an encouraging and necessary development.

### **The Hawai'i Context**

Hawai'i, in the heart of the Pacific Ocean, provided a special context for the 2016 World Conservation Congress, infusing it with the Aloha spirit and the tradition of living in harmony with nature. Aloha 'Āina an inherent part of the traditions and customs of Native Hawaiians, embodies the mutual respect for one another and a commitment of service to the natural world. This island context highlighted three critical issues for conservation in the coming decades:

1. The nexus between biological and cultural diversity, and how their conservation and sustainability requires a combination of traditional wisdom and modern knowledge.
2. The significance of the world's ocean for biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods.
3. The threats to biodiversity from habitat loss, climate change, invasive alien species, unsustainable exploitation, and pollution.

These issues are shared throughout the world, and the Congress provided an opportunity to examine nature-based, life-affirming solutions and the roles of governments, civil society and the private sector in their development and delivery. Embodying Aloha 'Āina globally will help address the tremendous environmental challenges we face.

### **The Opportunities Identified by the Congress**

To achieve the transformation required to promote a 'Culture of Conservation', while respecting human rights and gender equity, we need to support and build constituencies for nature, and to address the way human societies are changing nature and our world.

#### ***Cultivating a Culture of Conservation***

- *Linking Spirituality, Religion, Culture and Conservation*

The world's rich diversity of cultures and faith traditions are a major source of our ethical values and provide insights into ways of valuing nature. The wisdom of indigenous traditions is of particular significance as we begin to re-learn how to live in communion with, rather than in dominance over, the natural world. The *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si'*, the *Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change*, and the *Interfaith Climate Change Statement to World Leaders* among many other statements from world religions, provide insights.



**Solutions:** To create a stronger culture of conservation, we need to look beyond mere technical means. The values and wisdom of indigenous peoples, Elders, and the world's rich faith and spiritual communities offer a deeper understanding of our connections with nature, and help inform the necessary transformational changes in the financial, technological, industrial, governance and regulatory systems of our societies. To incorporate such insights, spiritual leaders and the conservation community need to come together to share the values that connect us. Artists, educators and innovators all can contribute to this expanded vision.

- *Engage and Empower Youth*

We need a global movement that nurtures a new generation across all sectors of society to connect with nature and take action to support conservation. And we need to engage and empower youth to work for the planet, creating together a culture of conservation that will endure. In an increasingly urbanized world, people, especially children, often have little chance to experience and connect with the natural world. Young adults have a greater stake in long-term sustainability, yet can feel that conservation is irrelevant to them.

**Solutions:** When navigating Island Earth, we rely on the winds of youth to fill our sails. Their vitality and innovation catalyzes and sustains conservation action. Nurturing youth requires access to nature, and investing in protected areas and parkland, especially in and near urban zones, so that they provide threshold experiences that lead to a life of conservation. Technology can help provide the means to connect and network. The conservation community has a responsibility to help youth by inspiring those who have yet to care for nature, empowering young professionals already inspired to develop their capacities and networks, and by lending our time and experience as mentors -- recognizing that youth have as much to teach as they have to learn.

***Addressing the Challenges of a Planet at the Crossroads***

- *The Challenge of Sustaining the Global Food Supply and Conserving Nature.*

The need to provide food for people has resulted in the intensification and industrialization of agriculture, including aquaculture, while traditionally farmed areas, biodiversity and natural ecosystems have been lost, and water resources have been depleted and degraded. Ecological communities and evolutionary processes have been disrupted. Ongoing use of pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers affect the biodiversity and ecosystem services that support our food production systems, and we have lost crop genetic diversity, nitrified our freshwater and coastal



ecosystems, and disrupted pollinator systems. Traditional farming practices are under pressure and associated knowledge is being lost.

**Solutions:** Providing global food security requires increasing the cost effectiveness of food production, reducing food loss in the distribution chain, decreasing the waste of food, changing food consumption preferences, and ensuring that water resources are managed sustainably. We need to generate the knowledge – and do so with urgency -- to create the ‘roadmap’ that can transform our complex food production/consumption systems so that they do not degrade the biodiversity and ecosystem services on which they depend. This will require bringing together currently fragmented organizations and initiatives, and reform of the current systems of counterproductive and perverse subsidies, taxes and other incentives, according to national circumstances. We must strengthen the governance system managing the food production system. While we need to increase overall efficiency of food, we must also maintain crop genetic diversity and local systems of production.

- *The Challenge of Preserving the Health of the World Ocean*

The world’s oceans, and the communities that depend on them, are under immense and unprecedented human pressures. Sea level rise and natural disasters not only affect livelihoods but threaten human security. Destructive, illegal and unsustainable fishing practices deplete fish populations and degrade their habitats and spawning grounds. Mining activities, pollution and plastic debris threaten marine ecosystems and species, destroy life and jeopardize the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in the long term. The integrity and resilience of key ecosystems such as coral reefs and other ocean life are threatened by rising temperatures, depletion and pollution of terrestrial water flows, over-fishing, and ocean acidification

**Solutions:** Throughout the world, countries are embracing vast marine protected areas as an approach to support resilience and secure the future of humankind. The scale at which oceanic biological and ecological processes operate demands matching conservation efforts. The United States of America on August 31, 2016 expanded the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, making it the biggest protected area on the planet at 1,508,670 km<sup>2</sup>. French Polynesia announced the creation of Taini Atea, a marine managed area covering their entire economic exclusive zone, a 5,000,000 km<sup>2</sup> area nearly half the size of Europe, building on the traditional management system of rāhui. Colombia has announced a quadrupling in size of the Malpelo Fauna and Flora Sanctuary bringing this UNESCO World Heritage site to 27,000 km<sup>2</sup>. These were preceded by other designations of large scale marine protected areas by governments such as Palau. At the other end of the scale, there is a proliferation of locally





managed marine areas. The total area of marine protected areas now exceeds that of land under protection and the rate of increase is an order of magnitude greater. However, protected area approaches alone are not sufficient, and linking diverse methods and tools, such as fisheries and coastal zone management, is essential if we are to solve the multiple, interacting challenges facing oceans. Ocean warming and acidification cannot be ignored. The pervasiveness of plastic waste in the ocean, and its effects on marine food chains demand that we find ways to “turn off the plastic tap”.

- *The Challenge of Ending Wildlife Trafficking*

The illegal trade in wildlife generates tens of billions of dollars for criminals every year and it continues to grow at an alarming rate. The involvement of organized criminal networks and militias pose a threat to national and international security as well as to social and economic development. The illegal trade in wildlife is leading to declines in the populations of target species, and often to their local extirpation, pushing some species to the brink of extinction. Local people lose access to the natural resources upon which they depend for their livelihoods, community integrity, and jobs.

**Solutions:** Stopping this illegal trade will require concerted efforts on many fronts: better protection of wildlife populations, both through laws and strengthened enforcement, behavioral change to reduce demand for these illegal products, and enhanced cooperation at all levels, including greater involvement of local communities. Solving this problem requires an integrated approach that addresses the whole supply chain of illegal products – from source to consumer – and involve all stakeholders, national and local government, as well as local communities. Real outcomes can only be realized by addressing the needs of local people, so that the benefits of a legal economy outweigh those of the illegal economy.

- *The Challenge of Engaging with the Private Sector*

The finance sector is increasingly aware of the potential that investing in nature has for generating returns, both in natural capital stock and also in economic yield. The corporate sector is also cognizant of the importance of maintaining nature to secure supply chains and manage institutional risk, especially under the uncertain conditions that climate change brings. And the conservation community is pressing hard for everyone to acknowledge the undeniable urgency of sustaining nature for the future of humanity.

**Solutions:** Economic and legal systems are needed that reward communities and companies for actions and investments that protect and restore nature. Equally, economic activity that destroys and degrades nature should be viewed as an economic cost imposed on the capacity of humanity



and the greater community of life to survive and flourish. There is a palpable and urgent need to significantly increase investment in conservation action from both public and private sector sources. A precondition for attracting private investment is that conservation opportunities exist at scale. Additionally, regulatory and policy regimes that create a level playing field for business operations and that incentivize private investment to promote conservation are necessary. Ultimately, a collaborative approach, including government, civil society and the private sector, is essential for success.

- *The Challenge of Climate Change*

Climate change is one the most pressing global challenges confronting humanity today. Healthy ecosystems – terrestrial, freshwater, marine and coastal – can act as powerful carbon sinks and reservoirs, and provide the basis for resilience to climate change impacts. Their better management, conservation and restoration – can make a crucial difference in enabling a low-carbon climate-resilient world, while also safeguarding biodiversity and aiding sustainable development. Furthermore, ecosystem-based adaptation helps reduce people's vulnerability to climate change impacts, providing significant co-benefits for local communities. Climate change is exacerbating the challenge of invasive alien species. The Paris Agreement recognizes the value of these ecosystem services and the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including oceans and the protection of biodiversity.

**Solutions:** The Paris Agreement confirms that the world community now accepts the reality of climate change, current and projected impacts, and the difficult fact that emissions from all sources must contract in line with what science prescribes to meet agreed targets. Nature-based solutions, such as protected areas, have become widely recognized as an essential component of a comprehensive approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Restoration of forests and peatlands are examples of such solutions. Critical to the successful implementation of the Paris Agreement is building trust across the full range of stakeholders, especially indigenous peoples and women in local communities, who engage directly in mitigating climate change. The conservation community's contributions are vital, providing solutions that reduce emissions, help vulnerable human communities adapt, manage impacts on native species, strengthen biosecurity measures to control and eradicate invasive alien species, and generate co-benefits for sustainability.



## Setting Sail

Such is the magnitude of the human ecological footprint, Island Earth's natural life support systems are straining to breaking point, imperiling the well-being and resilience of all life. Communities struggle everywhere to hold on to what is most precious, naturally and culturally. The forces of change can appear unrelenting.

The situation is urgent and a transformation is needed in the boldness of our aspirations, the strengths of our efforts, and the weight of our investments. Acting with a sense of responsibility for our planet and in solidarity, conservationists offer solutions for some of the world's most pressing environmental challenges.

Nature-based solutions have been shown - in many different settings and in both developed and developing countries - to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, help communities adapt to climate change impacts, reduce the risk of natural disasters, and support sustainable livelihoods.

Connected systems of protected areas, whether on land and sea, when effectively managed and governed, provide sanctuary for biodiversity and generate an extraordinary range of benefits for people. Ecosystem services from these protected areas contribute to human health and wellbeing.

Our problems are complex, values are contested, and the future uncertain. Strong partnerships are needed to implement conservation at the scales required. We need to broaden and deepen the global dialogue about how we relate to nature, motivate collective action, and ensure that nature-based solutions are fair, just and enduring. The conservation community will meet these challenges emboldened by the creativity of human imagination, empowered by scientific and traditional knowledge, and inspired by the spirit of Aloha 'Āina.