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CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

on the occasion of

WORLD MIGRATORY BIRD DAY 2012

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“Migratory birds and people—together through time”

World Migratory Bird Day 2012 celebrates the vital connection that migratory birds and people have had throughout history. Migratory birds continue to play an important cultural, aesthetic and economic role in the lives of people around the world today. However, humans are the greatest threat to migratory birds. Through habitat destruction and land use changes, and particularly through the loss of wetland habitat, human activities are causing the decline in populations of many migratory bird species.

The migratory paths of these birds can cover vast distances, going beyond national borders and often crossing entire continents. For this reason, bird conservation requires international cooperation that brings together governments, biologists, planners, birders and experts to conserve species throughout their full range. The Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) are examples of important international initiatives aiming to conserve migratory birds as part of global biodiversity. Another example is Important Bird Areas (IBA), developed by BirdLife International, which is an international network of areas recognized as being globally important habitat for the conservation of bird populations. Currently there are about 11,000 IBAs worldwide in over 200 countries.

Migratory birds are one of the best monitored species groups and their status is a good indicator for the overall status and trends of wider biodiversity loss. Despite improvements in the prospects of some species, the negative trends in far too many cases demonstrate that we need to better respond to the biodiversity crisis.

The good news is that governments are making stronger commitments to stem threats. At the Nagoya Biodiversity summit, governments agreed to the Global Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its Aichi Biodiversity Targets. Over the next ten years, this framework will provide the basis for a new relationship between humanity and nature, including actions that can help migratory species.

Commitments in the Strategic Plan include increasing the area and connectivity of protected areas, and to more sustainable agriculture, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture. These, and other policies will lead to biodiversity-friendly practices that reduce the impact of these activities on migratory species and the

habitats they rely upon. In some cases, restoration will be the best way to ensure that migratory birds have the habitat they need. Governments have committed themselves to restoring some 15 per cent of degraded ecosystems, as a contribution to ecosystem resilience and other benefits.

In order to ensure that these commitments are honoured, the United Nations General Assembly has declared 2011-2020 to be the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity. This decade will be an opportunity to raise awareness about the importance of biodiversity and the impacts of human activities on the species and ecosystems of our planet.

If we act now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, history will remember this as the time that people worked to build a future of life in harmony with nature – including with the migratory birds of our world.
