

November 17, 2013

Chairs' Summary of the first Asia Parks Congress

Kazuaki Hoshino
Yoshitaka Kumagai

The first Asia Parks Congress (APC) was held in Sendai, Miyagi from 13 to 17 November 2013 under the auspices of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Ministry of the Environment, Japan (MOE-J). The meeting was attended by approximately 800 participants from central and local governments, international organizations, NGOs, academia and students of 40 countries and regions across the World, including protected area authority officials from 22 Asian countries.

The participants of the first APC shared their rich experiences including current status, challenges and best practices of protected area management in Asia with the aim to facilitate the establishment of a regional partnership for achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and implementing the Programme of Work on Protected Areas of the Convention on Biological Diversity, thereby sending a message from Asia towards the World Parks Congress to be held in November, 2014 (WPC 2014).

At the opening ceremony, remarks were made by Mr. Nobuteru Ishihara (Minister of the Environment, Japan), Mr. Zhang Xinsheng (President of IUCN), Mr. Yoshihiro Murai (Governor of Miyagi Prefecture), Ms. Emiko Okuyama (Mayor of Sendai City), and Ms Sally Barnes (Chief Executive, Office of Environment & Heritage, New South Wales, Australia), followed by Keynote Speeches by Ms. Junko Tabei (Japanese Alpinist), Dr. Kazuhiko Takeuchi (Senior Vice-Rector of the United Nations University, Chair of the Central Environmental Counsel of Japan and Professor at the University of Tokyo), and Dr. Ernesto Enkerlin-Hoeflich (Chair, IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) and Professor, Montrey Tech).

During Plenary sessions, participants shared information on; Asian Philosophy of Protected Areas; Regional Protected Area Collaboration across Asia; IUCN World Parks Congress Sydney, Australia 2014; Achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and the Korean CBD COP12 Preparations; Strategic priorities for protected areas IUCN's Global Protected Areas Programme; The World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) - Understanding the Protection of Our Planet; Green Reconstruction Project and the Sanriku Fukko (Reconstruction) National Park of Japan; Biodiversity Efforts of the Business Sector of Japan. The participants also affirmed their commitment to cooperate through the provision of their latest national information for the "Protected Planet Asia" Report which is under preparation by UNEP/WCMC.

Following six Working Groups (WGs) were organized to present and discuss advanced cases related to protected areas: WG1 Natural Disasters and Protected Areas; WG2 Tourism and Environmental Education in Protected Areas; WG3 Culture/Tradition, and Protected Areas; WG4 Collaborative Management of Protected Areas; WG5 International Cooperation for Protected Areas; WG6 Biodiversity and Protected Areas.

In addition to Plenary and WG sessions, Youth sessions were also held.

The participants also deepened their understanding about the role for protected areas to play in post-disaster recovery, through field excursions by visiting the "Sanriku Reconstruction (Fukko) National Park" established by MOE-J at areas affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Outcomes of the first APC

The participants agreed by consensus to "Asia Protected Areas Charter" as a guideline based on Asian experiences for the reconciliation between nature conservation and development in the region.

Productive and constructive discussions at six Working Groups also led to the formulation of "Message from the 1st Asia Parks Congress to the IUCN World Parks Congress, Sydney 2014". Besides, young participants including researchers of the future concluded their rich discussion in the form of "The first Asia Parks Congress Youth Declaration".

These documents were handed over to representatives of IUCN, the WCPA and the Government of Australia, so that these outcomes would be fully reflected in discussions at WPC 2014.

The Way Forward

The participants affirmed that they would cooperate for the contribution to discussions at WPC 2014, by making good use of the outcomes of the first APC.

The participants recognized the need of a cooperative framework in relation to protected areas in Asia. This led to the creation of a partnership planning committee (tentative name) consisted mainly of IUCN Asia Regional Office, the WCPA and Japan (MOE-J), as well as interested governments and international organizations.