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Asia Protected Areas Charter

The Asia Challenge

Asia is the world's most rapidly growing region as well as one of the most bio-diverse. This dynamic development has led to unprecedented growth, but also to unprecedented demands on nature and its bounty.

Asian peoples have historically lived in harmony with nature, developing cultures and traditions that benefit from it, while also respecting the power, beauty and delicate balance of the natural world.

However, the pace of growth and development is now such that this ancient balance is being destroyed, threatening species and ecosystems – the very foundations on which our development depends.

Throughout history, protected areasⁱ have proved to be one of the most successful approaches to conserve nature and associated cultural resources in Asia and worldwide. Now, as Asia emerges on the world stage, our protected areas – and the vital role they play in connecting people to nature, people to community and culture, and people to people – require our urgent attention if we are to build a brighter future for the region and guarantee human well-being for generations to come.

We, the delegates to the first Asia Parks Congress, recognize the crucial value of Asia's protected areas for both ecological and economic well-being, and for building a safe, harmonious and prosperous future for communities in Asia and worldwide. We further recognize that the Asia boom has resulted in a young continent, with a thriving population of youth to which we must pass on our current protected areas knowledge and work, and whose energy and innovation we must embrace to secure this future.

We recognize that Asia's extensive and diverse protected area systems have a crucial role to play in reaching global biodiversity goals, including Aichi Target 11, which calls for at least 17 per cent of the world's terrestrial and inland water areas, and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, to be equitably managed and conserved by 2020.

We are, therefore, acutely aware of the urgent need to enhance the management of Asia's protected areas, by increasing their share of human and financial resources, particularly for

1 those on the ground at the conservation frontlines, and adopting global best practice
2 approaches.

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4 **Protected Areas for Disaster Risk Reduction and Recovery**

5 We recognize that disasters in Asia are a significant and ever-present threat, as exemplified by
6 the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, and
7 typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda in 2013, and that damage caused by disasters has become more severe
8 as a result of population growth, urbanization, poorly planned development, inappropriate land
9 use and climate change.

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11 We also recognize that ecosystem based disaster risk reduction and protected areas enhance
12 local resilience in areas at high risk of disasters. Such proactive approaches also contribute to
13 disaster prevention and mitigation through utilization of ecosystem services. Furthermore,
14 healthy ecosystems sustain industries which are underpinned by local biodiversity, such as
15 agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and tourism.

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17 We recognize that nature restoration efforts that contribute to local community recovery in
18 disaster-affected areas can promote people's understanding of the natural environment and
19 ecosystems. Robust systems of protected areas can help increase safety for people and
20 communities, and help reduce damage to property and infrastructure.

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22 **Harmonization of Regional Development and the Conservation of Biodiversity**

23 We recognize that development in Asia is now accelerating. We must find a way to harmonize
24 this development with the conservation of nature, by drawing upon and revitalizing the region's
25 rich heritage of traditional practices, systems and beliefs. The region holds rich flora and fauna
26 in its natural environments, and harbors some of the world's highest biodiversity. Its wide
27 range of climatic regions stretches across an exceedingly wide terrestrial and marine range.
28 Many biodiversity hotspots are found within these areas, and the effective management and
29 expansion of protected areas in them is critical. The integrity of protected areas needs to be
30 maintained within this development context.

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32 We believe that protected areas are not only a means for the protection of the natural
33 environment, but also a means for achieving harmony between humans and nature. They are
34 also powerful engines for sustainable development and for securing human well-being. As such,
35 human interventions through promoting best practices and good management in protected
36 areas are instrumental to the maintenance of biodiversity in Asia's landscapes and seascapes.

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Collaborative Management of Protected Areas

We recognize that communities in Asia are traditionally connected to the land and sea, and that protected areas must take this into account. Protected areas must therefore also help provide economic benefits and improved livelihoods to the region in which they are located without compromising biodiversity.

We recognize that in order to prosper, protected areas in Asia must connect to the wider landscapes and seascapes within which they exist, and that governments must help facilitate this. Asia must extol traditional approaches that see protected areas not as isolated islands in a sea of development, but as blue and green threads that restore the fabric of nature. Beyond the physical landscapes and seascapes, a diverse range of individuals, local communities and institutions must be engaged and resourced to ensure protected areas benefit all. These include local governments, the private sector, indigenous peoples, NGOs and youth. Diverse governance regimes are necessary for protected areas in Asia and should contribute to effective conservation of biodiversity. Governance for protected areas should be based on their specific ecological, historical and political contexts.

Linkages between Protected Area Management and Cultures and Traditions

We recognize that protected areas, especially sacred natural sites and indigenous peoples and community conserved areas, are often deeply rooted in local cultures and traditions and that these must be supported and encouraged in order to flourish and reconnect people with nature.

Furthermore, we recognize that many cultures and religions originating in Asia have a deep reverence for natural features and phenomena, and have created sacred natural sites that are protected and managed by local communities. These special places not only contribute to the spiritual richness and well-being of people and communities, but also play a valuable role in conserving biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Sustainable Tourism and Education for Environment and Sustainable Development

We recognize that protected areas provide opportunities for tourism and education, and that nature contributes to human health and well-being. Protected areas also contribute to community welfare, by serving as ecotourism assets which benefit local peoples and businesses. As the pace of life in Asia quickens and more and more people live in cities, protected areas are becoming increasingly important as harbors of relaxation and refuge which reconnect people to nature's rhythms.

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2 We recognize that protected areas with beautiful scenery, rich biodiversity, and strong local
3 cultures and traditions are attractive destinations for tourism. Tourism in protected areas must
4 be responsible and sustainable, and act as an incentive to encourage a sense of stewardship in
5 visitors, managers, local communities, businesses and other stakeholders. Education for
6 environment and sustainable development is a useful tool to help interpret the natural and
7 cultural values of protected areas.

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9 **Strengthening Protected Area Collaboration**

10 We recognize that protected areas in Asia cannot address the challenges of Asia's growth and
11 development without strengthening cooperation and collaboration. We must promote
12 international collaboration to identify important places for biodiversity, especially in developing
13 countries, so as to ensure resilience to climate change. Enhancing Asian protected area
14 collaboration would increase the effectiveness of the region's protected areas, and lead to
15 increased dialogue and strengthened ties among countries. We also recognize the importance of
16 embedding protected areas into broader land use and sectoral planning. Furthermore, we also
17 note the importance of stimulating national and site level alliances, and point to the necessity
18 of increased coordination and cooperation with existing biodiversity related international and
19 regional agreements and frameworks.

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21 **Our Commitments**

22 The time to seize the opportunities associated with Asia's unprecedented growth and dynamism
23 is now. As Asia increasingly begins to lead on the world stage, it is imperative that our protected
24 areas also take the lead, and that we use our wealth of cultures, traditions, and human and
25 natural resources, coupled with our optimism and creativity, to actively address challenges here
26 and worldwide.

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28 We affirm our commitment to broaden understanding of the important role that protected areas
29 play in disaster risk reduction and recovery.

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31 We affirm our commitment to increase the potential of protected areas to provide opportunities
32 for responsible tourism and environmental education in a way that is participatory, sustainable
33 and beneficial to local communities.

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35 We affirm our commitment to enhance protected area networks and cooperation through
36 stronger engagement with central and local governments, business, indigenous peoples, NGOs

1 and youth, to strengthen the efforts to mainstream protected area conservation and
2 management in the developmental agenda, and to increase financial and technical support for
3 protected areas.

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5 We affirm our commitment to respect and integrate local cultures and traditions, and to listen
6 to the voices of those practicing them, in the designation and management of protected areas.

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8 We affirm our commitment to ensure the integrity of protected areas by reducing the threats to
9 biodiversity and the ecosystem services they hold, in addition to strengthening their ability to
10 serve as reservoirs of globally threatened biodiversity and to contribute to the achievement of
11 the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

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13 We affirm our commitment to increase protected areas collaboration, to inspire and innovate
14 through these enhanced relationships, to improve governance and management capacity, and to
15 champion the value of protected areas in Asia.

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17 Through these commitments, we will strengthen our collaborative spirit and heighten our
18 resolve to ensure Asia remains a leader in protected area policy and practice. We will capture
19 the energy and imagination of the current Asia boom to build a foundation of connection,
20 respect, and momentum for protected areas to conserve biodiversity. We will work toward a
21 future where protected areas enhance human progress, resulting in people living in harmony
22 with nature.

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ⁱ For the purposes of this Charter, ‘protected areas’ are as defined by IUCN: *“A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values”*. Protected areas include terrestrial, marine and freshwater systems and include protected areas established and managed under the four governance types recognized by IUCN, viz: governance by government (at various levels); governance by various rightsholders and stakeholders together (shared governance); governance by private individuals and organizations; and governance by indigenous peoples and/or local communities. Finally, this Charter also concerns the many private protected areas (PPAs), sacred sites, indigenous peoples’ and community conserved areas (ICCAs), and other protected areas which may not yet have achieved formal recognition and recording within the UNEP-WCMC World Database on Protected Areas.