

001 Improving tree planting practices – Planting the right tree in the right place for the right purpose

DEEPLY CONCERNED by the continuous loss of native forests and species diversity and tree genetic diversity, and by the fact that 38% of the world's tree species are listed as threatened on the IUCN Red List;

CONSCIOUS of the increasingly large number of large-scale, short-rotation, monoculture plantations primarily focused on tree numbers, with little attention to species selection, genetic diversity, site selection or aftercare;

ALARMED ALSO by the constant loss of soil, on a global scale, caused by poorly managed monoculture forestry exploitation, which leads to the disappearance of this non-renewable element of geodiversity — taking thousands of years to form — from our mountains, creating issues such as poor water quality, eutrophication, turbidity and downstream impacts;

MINDFUL that tree planting is often portrayed as an effective climate mitigation measure, whereas evidence shows that planting the wrong tree in the wrong place (e.g. in native grassland) or clearing native forests for tree monocultures can actually lead to net carbon emissions and biodiversity loss;

CONSCIOUS that forest plantations are needed to meet humanity's needs for fibre, fuel, timber, medicines and food;

AWARE of the importance of sustainable forest management approaches, such as agroforestry and multipurpose forestry, as an alternative to intensive agriculture;

ALSO AWARE of the need to use multiple restoration methods to meet global restoration goals, including approaches, such as assisted natural regeneration, which do not rely on tree planting;

RECOGNISING that restoring and conserving natural forest ecosystems, particularly remaining primary and intact forests, is essential to halt the biodiversity crisis, to store carbon, and to provide resources for people;

AWARE of the importance of global guidelines on precautions when introducing and planting non-native trees and the importance of avoiding use of planting material of narrow genetic diversity or unknown origin;

RECOGNISING the existence of global initiatives and standards such as those developed by IUCN, the Global Partnership on Forest and Landscape Restoration, the Society for Ecological Restoration, the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, and the Global Biodiversity Standard, as well as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) Target 2;

NOTING the importance of the Kew Declaration (2021), endorsed by 422 organisations and over 2,600 individuals from 114 countries, calling for reforestation pledges to safeguard global forest biodiversity; and

RECOGNISING the need to avoid afforestation projects on valuable ecosystems such as natural and semi-natural grasslands, tundra and peatlands;

The IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025, at its session in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates:

1. CALLS on the Director General, Commissions and Members to:

a. ensure that rigorous biodiversity and social safeguards are applied to all forest restoration initiatives – including those labelled as Nature-Based Solutions and under the Bonn Challenge – with emphasis on Indigenous and locally-led initiatives;

b. promote the use of native species, including threatened native tree species, using genetically diverse planting material of documented origin in restoration initiatives and highlight the risks of

planting invasive or non-native species; encourage high-quality, climate-resilient seed sources appropriate to site conditions and adaptive restoration; and promote the recovery of indigenous species and forest integrity;

c. work with international bodies and relevant research organisations to differentiate between tree plantations and natural forests, and encourage the use of advanced satellite monitoring and reporting of changes in cover of trees; and

d. promote simple, scientifically robust and recognised international certification schemes that demonstrate co-benefits for biodiversity, climate and livelihoods; and support frameworks aligned with the Cancun Safeguards under REDD+ and ensure safeguards are respected; and

2. CALLS UPON practitioners, policymakers, foresters, businesses, researchers and donors to:

a. support tree planting, restoration and landscape regeneration initiatives that protect and enhance biodiversity and soil integrity, stabilise and enhance water cycles, and uphold land tenure and access rights of Indigenous peoples, as well as those of local communities;

b. collaborate with the botanical, ecological restoration, conservation genetics, mycological, agroforestry, and wider conservation community, including holders of traditional knowledge, and Indigenous science, to adopt practices that enhance biodiversity and soil integrity, and ensure ecological connectivity and landscape resilience; and

c. facilitate the full and effective engagement of Indigenous peoples as well as local communities in seed conservation, nursery development and production of high-quality planting material, to support equitable livelihoods and long-term forest resilience.