

049 Strengthening safe civic spaces to fulfil the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

NOTING that safe and secure civic spaces are physical or digital environments where individuals and groups can freely organise, exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms, foster participation for social cohesion, governance and community action for nature conservation;

RECALLING IUCN Resolution 18.2 *Governance of The World Conservation Union* (Perth, 1990), Resolution 17.9 *NGO partnership with IUCN* (San José, 1988), Resolution 5.003 *Prioritizing IUCN membership awareness and support* (Jeju, 2012), Resolution 3.081 *Implementation of Principle 10 by building comprehensive good governance systems* (Bangkok, 2004), and Resolution 7.115 *Protecting environmental human and peoples' rights defenders and whistleblowers* (Marseille, 2020) that emphasise governance, partnerships, and protection of environmental defenders and whistleblowers;

ACKNOWLEDGING the alignment of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, especially Targets 1, 14, 15, 21, 22 and 23, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 16 and SDG 17, in promoting inclusive and collaborative governance;

NOTING international instruments such as the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, in particular, Principle 10, the Aarhus Convention, and the Escazú Agreement, which stress the importance of access to information, public participation, environmental justice and the protection of environmental defenders, as well as encompassing whistleblowers and their incentivising;

RECOGNISING the central role of civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, and Indigenous Peoples' Organisations in achieving the IUCN's vision of "a just world that values and conserves nature";

CONCERNED about the rising threats to civic spaces, including violence against environmental defenders, threats to whistleblowers, regulatory restrictions and deteriorating working conditions for IUCN Members and other relevant actors, as well as the spread of unethical practices in the conservation community such as misinformation, corruption and defamation; and

EMPHASISING that civic spaces grounded in access to information, public participation and access to justice are a prerequisite for achieving IUCN's mission and vision;

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

1. REQUESTS the Director General, as part of its One Programme Approach, to develop an IUCN standard and guiding principles safeguarding civic spaces;

2. REQUESTS the Director General, with the Council's support, to develop a civic space protocol and grievance mechanisms for immediate assistance, mediation and dialogue for Members and partners facing threats, establish an early-warning system for shrinking civic spaces, and facilitate capacity-building strategies and resources to empower National and Regional Committees in this matter;

2bis. REQUESTS the Director General to develop the policy and action plan on environmental human and peoples' rights defenders and whistleblowers as encouraged in Resolution 7.115, and that the Commission on Education and Communication, the Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy and the World Commission on Environmental Law initiate the campaign to promote and support the work of defenders and whistleblowers as requested of them in Resolution 7.115;

3. REQUESTS Commissions to carry out research on civic spaces and effective conservation outcomes;

4. ENCOURAGES National Committees to promote inclusive civic spaces, adopt national codes of conduct and inform the Director General of specific cases of concern;

5. ENCOURAGES multilateral donors to invest in building the capacity of IUCN Members and Commission experts in this matter and in safeguarding requirements in their funding strategies;

6. URGES governments to ratify and uphold policies guaranteeing safe environmental civic spaces in order to protect civil society organisations, the rights of Indigenous peoples as set out in UNDRIP, environmental Human Rights Defenders and whistleblowers to operate freely and without fear of violence, restrictions or reprisal; and ENCOURAGES them to ratify and implement instruments such as the Aarhus Convention and the Escazu Agreement where appropriate; and

7. CALLS on the private sector to respect civic spaces and international human rights standards, requiring nature-positive commitments to rely on ethical practices.