

## The Chilika Statement

*We, the 400 participants from 32 countries, at the Asian Wetland Symposium 2005, having met at Bhubaneswar and Chilika, Orissa, India, from 6-9 February 2005, hereby RECOGNISE:*

*That* wetlands in Asia have traditionally provided people with ecological security and livelihood support through their natural processes and functions; increasing population pressures and lack of awareness about the role of wetlands have led to degradation of wetlands and increased vulnerability for local users; there is an urgent need to address the challenges posed by unbalanced sectoral development, poverty and inadequate capacity for effective restoration and management of wetlands;

*That* building upon the Asian Wetland Symposia of 1992 and 2001 and their recommendations that provided an effective mechanism for promoting conservation and wise use of wetlands in Asia through networking of international and national organizations and individuals, new strategic directions, partnerships and pioneering examples of community-based management are emerging through sharing of experiences and knowledge within the region;

*That* Chilika Lagoon in India is an outstanding example of wetland conservation and wise use following the principles of integrated management with strong emphasis on local people's participation and shared decision-making through networking of local, national and international experiences; restoration measures adopted have led to significant improvement in socio-economic conditions of communities dependant on Chilika Lagoon for livelihoods while maintaining ecological integrity;

*That* the recent *tsunami* in the Indian Ocean severely affected the coastal resource base and livelihoods of many people, and has posed new challenges for restoration of coastal wetlands, including mangroves, sea grasses, coral reefs and other related ecosystems.

*Thus, we URGE:*

*That* degradation of wetlands caused by unsustainable development be urgently halted and reversed, and knowledge based strategies and techniques be adopted for conservation and restoration of wetland ecosystems and livelihood improvement of communities; the cultural values of wetlands having great relevance to wetland communities be recognized and integrated into wetland management practices; mainstreaming of their ecological and socio economic values into developmental planning be promoted to achieve poverty alleviation and sustainable livelihoods.

*Therefore, we CALL FOR ACTION:*

*That* innovative ecosystem based approaches be adopted to promote wetland conservation and management to support sustainable livelihoods with emphasis on:

- Maintenance of optimal environmental flows to ensure functional integrity of wetland ecosystems;

- Promotion of biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of wetland resources incorporating traditional knowledge and wisdom of local people;
- Documentation and sharing of cultural heritage and values to provide a platform for conservation and management;
- Urgently supporting local livelihoods through traditional knowledge base and eco-enterprises, including eco-tourism, and promoting public-private partnerships for adding value to wetland products to generate additional income and thereby reduce pressures on wetland resources;
- Strengthening of community based institutions and traditional resource user groups to ensure their rights and interests recognized in the process of planning, development and implementation of wetland management plans;
- Mainstreaming wetlands into sectoral development planning at all levels to ensure sustainable development;
- Adoption of wetland conservation and management policies, plans and strategies for the wise use of wetlands;
- Identification, promotion, and replication of successful cases of partnerships for wetland management and conservation, and disseminating these examples at the local, national and regional levels;
- Assignment of the highest priority to education and awareness activities as the foundation towards changing attitudes and perceptions towards sustainable wetland management;
- Strengthening and development of capacity building programs for wetland managers, policy makers, planners, practitioners, media, decision makers and local communities;
- Restoration of wetlands to maintain ecological integrity and productivity to sustain local livelihoods;
- Urgent actions for rehabilitation of coastal wetlands affected by the *tsunami* to restore sustainable livelihoods of the affected communities and conservation of biodiversity;

*And that* the organizers seek the support and assistance of the Government of India and the Government of Japan to convey this Statement to the forthcoming Asian Regional Meeting on the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971), the 9th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands to be held in Kampala, Uganda in November 2005, and the 11th World Lake Conference to be held in Nairobi, Kenya in October 2005.

Bhubaneswar, 9 February 2005