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## International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Leaders Forum

Opening address

Ambassador Jürg Lauber, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations and other international organizations at Geneva

Geneva, 8 Oct. 2024

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Madam President of the IUCN, Razan Al Mubarak,  
Madam Director General of the IUCN, Grethel Aguilar,  
Excellencies,  
Dear friends of nature conservation,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you here in Geneva, on behalf of the Swiss government, as the host country of the Union and co-host of this Forum.

Switzerland values this initiative and congratulates the IUCN for once again organizing the Leaders Forum in Geneva. Following the success of the 2023 edition, it seems the organizers thought "never change a winning team", and here we are again to build a bridge between nature and the economy.

Switzerland's relationship with the IUCN is longstanding. The Union's secretariat has been based here for 63 years, just a few years after its creation in Fontainebleau, in France, in 1948. Based in "International Geneva", the Union enjoys a unique and fertile environment that facilitates

dialogue. It allows the IUCN to influence processes in other international organizations represented here, for example those linked to the UN.

Last year, the Union celebrated its 75th anniversary. We, the IUCN family, can be proud of its founders, who foresaw that human activities would increasingly impact nature. These activities leave marks. The constant population growth and economic development come at a cost – often paid by nature.

We must acknowledge the degradation of ecosystems, the loss of biodiversity, the devastating effects of climate change, and the pollution of air, soil, and water. This brings us to recognize a triple planetary crisis.

Governments are trying to address these challenges by strengthening environmental laws. But let's be honest, it's not popular to place environmental policies at the center of the political agenda. It takes time to adopt the necessary laws, strategies and measures. Unfortunately, time is something we no longer have. And often, opponents to ambitious environmental policies challenge the scientific foundations when drafting environmental laws.

Here lies the crucial role of the IUCN. With its expertise and unique network of scientists, the Union provides objective analysis, explanations, and possible solutions.

This applies at both national and international levels. During environmental negotiations, governments often rely on organizations like the IUCN to provide the scientific basis for defining environmental policies. I doubt we could have adopted a new Global Biodiversity Framework at COP-15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity without IUCN's prior work.

The same is true for non-state actors. The Union has everything it needs to be a credible partner for regions, cities, or the private sector. With its network of scientific experts, civil society organizations, and global presence, the IUCN is ideally placed to bring stakeholders together to strengthen dialogue, promote nature conservation, and deploy nature-based solutions to tackle global climate, food, and development challenges.

Addressing systematically global environmental challenges in connection with human well-being and development needs is part of the IUCN's DNA. This is vital in the context of today's complex triple planetary crisis and the setbacks in poverty reduction due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Switzerland places great importance on environmental issues. In our foreign policy strategy for 2024-2027, the ecological dimension of sustainability has been integrated as a new foreign policy theme. It focuses on climate change, biodiversity, and pollution.

Switzerland is not only the host country of the IUCN headquarters, close to Geneva. Through the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), our government is also one of the Union's main donors. The SDC strives to strengthen cooperation with the IUCN, both institutionally and operationally. For example, the IUCN, in collaboration with WWF and the World Resources Institute (WRI), created the "Forest Landscape Restoration Hub", an innovative initiative to accelerate and scale up forest landscape restoration efforts in multiple countries. A Swiss contribution to this Hub combines the expertise of the IUCN, WWF, and WRI with the SDC's experience in forest-dependent livelihoods.

Thanks to its unique and extensive network, the IUCN can also act as a remarkable intermediary, bringing together various actors and stakeholders. And that is why we are here today. We are using the platform that the IUCN offers through this Leaders Forum to discuss the urgent environmental challenges facing our world, facing all life on earth. This year's theme, "Harnessing Innovation, Enabling Conservation", allows us to explore how technology and innovation can help us address the challenges of the triple planetary crisis. And where there's technology and innovation, there's engagement with the private sector.

I sincerely thank our Union and its staff for providing us this opportunity to exchange, learn from one another, and – as leaders – take responsibility. Let us seize this opportunity for fruitful discussions.

Thank you.