

**Ministerial Conference: Nature Protection in the Caucasus**  
Promoting Transboundary Cooperation for CBD Implementation  
9-11 March 2006, Berlin – Germany



**Welcome**

Dr. Peter Prokosch, CEO, WWF - Germany

## **Opening speech for the**

### **Ministerial Conference "Nature Protection in the Caucasus – Promoting Transboundary Cooperation for CBD Implementation"**

Berlin, 9 March 2006

Dr. Peter Prokosch  
CEO / managing director WWF Deutschland

Your excellency, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the WWF I would like to say what a very great honour and pleasure it is for me to welcome such high-ranking guests here in Berlin in connection with such an important subject:

the protection of the unique nature of the Caucasus Mountains, which not only boast a great biological diversity, but also represent one of mankind's oldest cultural sites and are home to a variety of different peoples and nations.

Today I am proud to welcome the ministers and delegates from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia as well as the delegates from Russia, Turkey and Iran.

I am extremely pleased that the German Minister for Economic Cooperation, Mrs. Wieczorek-Zeul, has agreed to act as patron for this conference and would also like to thank the (Reconstruction Loan Corporation) KfW for their extremely friendly cooperation in preparing the conference.

A very special welcome goes to the representatives from governmental and non-governmental organisations and scientific institutes who have offered their commitment and scientific expertise and are thus making a crucial contribution to the success of this conference and our common conservation efforts.

The very fact that this conference is taking place marks an important step towards ensuring that the Caucasus is preserved for generations to come, and we are proud to be your hosts here in Germany today and over the next few days.

The WWF Germany was founded in 1963 and was one of the first national organisations of the World Wide Fund for Nature. Today we are part of WWF's international nature protection network which is currently involved in projects in over 100 countries all over the world.

We, as the fourth largest national WWF organisation, are involved in over 70 projects in 12 ecological regions of the world.

WWF Germany systematically concentrates its efforts on the 200 ecological regions of the earth that represent the biological diversity of our planet most widely.

The Caucasus is one of these 200 regions. It is also one of the 25 hot spots of global biodiversity that CI, Conservation International has designated as the focus of its project work.

The Caucasus is the cradle of many European and Asian species; nowhere in the temperate Eurasian climatic zone is there such a rich and diverse ecosystem.

The Caucasus can therefore be seen as a library of life on earth. Not only does it conceal enormous biogenetic resources, but it is also one of those regions that make our planet so beautiful.

However, we are not starting out from scratch in our efforts to protect the Caucasus. We can reap the benefit of years of preparatory work that has gone before us.

The WWF has been working in the Caucasus since 1992. This ecological region covers 6 countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran, Russia and Turkey. The WWF has its own organisations in 5 of these countries and in Iran we cooperate with CENESTA, a befriended organisation

A very important milestone in the eyes of the WWF was the establishment of the Borjomi Kharagauli National Park in Georgia.

However, we can only do justice to the significance of this and other conservation areas if we do not see them in isolation but if we treat the ecological region as a natural unit.

This means we must learn to look beyond borders set up by man and work together. Nature knows no boundaries.

We can only protect the Caucasus leopard from extinction if we keep as much of its natural habitat as possible intact, and provide safe paths and corridors for it to pass and even to cross borders.

The WWF is already cooperating with the governments of the Caucasus region, all of whom, incidentally, have signed the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD).

The Ecoregional Conservation Plan (ECP), jointly drawn up by over 180 experts from governments, NGOs and scientific institutions, is in our opinion the central instrument in helping the Caucasian states to fulfil the obligations arising from the CBD.

This process plays an exemplary role in the implementation of CBD targets, primarily because of the excellent cooperation with governments and international sponsors. I would particularly like to mention the KfW, Conservation International and the McArthur-Foundation in this context.

The WWF is also cooperating with the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (the BMZ), the KfW and other international organisations to set up a trust fund with the aim of guaranteeing permanent financing for the protection network in the southern Caucasus region.

This can also be seen as a milestone in implementing the CBD in the region.

The international nature conservation strategy followed by the WWF not only pursues the target of conserving nature but also promoting its sustained use.

We not only seek to protect nature itself, but also ourselves, mankind who lives among and on these natural resources.

We live in the hope that with this conference we can make a contribution to and with the Caucasian states, in order to help them to safeguard their natural wealth and the prosperity of their inhabitants and to further peaceful cohabitation among all the peoples.