

CMS / Gorilla Fundraising Dinner, Frankfurt

**Speech by Robert Hepworth
CMS Executive Secretary
10 June 2009**

“CMS – A Jewel amongst Treaties”

Princess, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be with my friends here tonight and to thank our hosts and sponsors, BMU and FZS. I do so not only as chief officer of CMS but also as current Chairman of the committee of all the UN agencies based in Germany.

Germany had a key role in developing the Convention on Migratory Species/ Bonn Convention. Wolfgang Burhenne can recall that – because he was part of it – it is wonderful to see him here again tonight. We will celebrate our 30th anniversary later this month, making us the longest standing UN organization in Germany. I would therefore like to reflect on what makes CMS so unique and some of our achievements over the past 3 decades.

Migratory species constitute those 8 to 10 thousand of the world's 1.8 million known species that travel at regular intervals between feeding and breeding grounds, sometimes with thousands of kilometres between them or sometimes relatively short distances across national boundaries. Migratory animals range in form from gorillas, leopards and antelopes to fish, turtles, bats and birds. And they vary in size from whales and elephants to apparently frail and featherweight butterflies like the Monarch. What unites them all is the fact that no one country can secure their survival on its own. International cooperation is an absolute must for the conservation of these nomads of necessity, and this adds an additional level of complexity and vulnerability.

CMS is the vehicle by which we achieve this co-operation. It is a substantial challenge and perhaps as a result the first decade of the Convention in the 1980s was hard going.

I remember where CMS was when I became the British focal point in January 1991. The Convention was struggling to survive. It had not been

able to create a CMS-led species agreement after 12 years of existence. There were only about 35 Parties, mostly European.

What happened? We persevered in the true interests of conservation. We targeted our efforts on two draft Agreements – one for bats and one for small whales. By the time of the 3rd COP of CMS in September 1991 in Geneva the bats agreement was virtually ready to sign off, and we were able to do the same for the small whales agreement by devoting several sessions of the Plenary (which I chaired) to the negotiation. These were the first two CMS-led regional species agreements created – better known to us all now as Eurobats and ASCOBANS. Their creation actually saved the Convention.

It was human perseverance that built CMS and allowed it first to survive and then to flourish. Over the last 5 years, we have as a Convention been able to increase the rate of progress very tangibly. The number of Parties has grown by almost 30% to 111, 30 more countries are members of CMS Agreements. More importantly, the majority of Parties are now from Latin America, Africa, Asia and Oceania, transforming us into a truly global body.

We have doubled the number of species Agreements and MOUs – from 12 to 24. These have come thick and fast in the last 3 years: Elephants, African and Pacific Cetaceans, Saiga Antelope, South American Grassland birds and flamingoes, Atlantic monk seals, Africa-Eurasian birds of prey, Indian Ocean and Pacific dugongs and, hopefully by the end of 2009, sharks and houbara bustards and, of course, the prized Agreement for gorillas, which we negotiated in Paris in 2007. This is not a soft, non-binding agreement. It is a binding international treaty. It is thanks to the efforts of the 9 African range states that took part in that meeting in Paris 18 months ago that we were able to negotiate it in just 3 days. Delighted to see African friends and colleagues from range states present here tonight and also Roseline Beudels, Scientific Councillor for Belgium, who played a substantial role in the negotiation. The Gorilla Agreement is now fully operational, and we are taking advantage of the BMU funded symposium to hold a high level meeting of the Parties here tomorrow.

The Convention's financial resources have increased. Above all our ability to attract project contributions which have risen by over 300%, and, for the first time, the input of major resources from our voluntary sector partners (notably through staff secondment), for example IFAW, and the commercial sector (sponsorship for Years of the Dolphin and Gorilla and individual

projects). TUI and BAYER, Lufthansa and National Geographic Deutschland have been notable contributors in Germany. Role of Friends of CMS - Freunde der Bonner Konvention – chaired initially by Klaus Töpfer, my esteemed former boss, and now the equally esteemed Manfred Niekisch of FZS, have been instrumental in building up our profile with the private sector. I hope this event here tonight will bring more interest. Despite hard economic times, animals are very good for marketing – and CMS is a Convention who had its HQ here in Germany for the whole of our 30-year history.

We have developed many new partnerships – and many other Agreements have been signed with other partners, including Birdlife International, Wetlands International, CIC, WDCS, IFAW, AMMPA, WCS and WAZA.

We have deployed the energy and commitment of youth to conserve migratory species through a new intern scheme in CMS that has already attracted more than 80 graduates and students to work with us in the last 3 years.

We have an active outreach campaign producing a stream of highly commended publications such as those on wildlife watching, climate change and migratory species, Sahelo-Saharan antelopes and gorillas. Later this month we will launch our new publication on flyways at the formal 30th Anniversary Celebration at the City Hall in Bonn. Then we have the highly successful and visible CMS “Year of” campaigns, undertaken with our NGO and commercial partners – Year of the Turtle in 2006, Year of the Dolphin in 2007-2008 and the current 2009 campaign – Year of the Gorilla which is going from strength to strength and will hold a major seminar in Frankfurt Zoo Society starting tomorrow.

Last week we opened our first major office outside Europe, in Abu Dhabi, which will administer the new birds of prey and dugong agreement. It is generously financed by Abu Dhabi and presents us with a huge opportunity to engage more fully with the countries that surround the Indian Ocean.

Looking West, as well as East, another of the key tasks I am determined to complete before my retirement in 2012 is to build a strong working partnership with the US Government, and either secure or substantially advance their future accession to the Convention. Through the generosity of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, we were able to secure free offices in

Washington last year where we are now working day by day to build up our profile, create new partnerships and engage with the key US Government-agencies.

It is my conviction that CMS cannot afford to lose any momentum in North America. We have a unique opportunity to work with all relevant stakeholders there at a time when it appears possible, even likely that the US is reconsidering whether to join several MEAs. Similarly, we are making strong efforts to recruit Russia, China, Brazil and a number of other key countries for animal migration. The steadily progress we are making in recruiting smaller developing countries to the Convention is a signal that we are regarded as relevant and beneficial to new objectives. In fact I can announce today the 112th Party – Mozambique- will join the Convention in August 2009, following the recent accession of our 111th Party, Montenegro.

I must on this occasion remind you of the ideals that presided over the founding of CMS; it is a Convention for conservation – the only UN body specifically devoted to the conservation of species and of their ecosystems. It is fashionable today to assert that our environment must be protected and valued only for its economic potential worth. It is certainly an interesting approach, and there are more and more organizations addressing these aspects of the environment. But that is not what CMS is about – it is about the wonderful spectacle of animals and Nature and the necessity to conserve this for the good of mankind. It is about the obligation we have to ensure these treasures are protected for future generations. The purity of CMS' vision must be preserved.

By helping wildlife first, CMS actually maximizes its benefits for local people, especially in poorer countries, by securing environmental services from ecosystems and providing direct income benefits from tourism and wildlife watching. The CMS record speaks for itself. The Parties and our partners have persevered for 30 years to create it. The further threat to wildlife from global warming makes the Convention – as a specialized treaty for conservation – even more important than ever. It is the Governments and the people they represent who must defend CMS. It is a fine Convention, and well worth defending. It is a jewel amongst Treaties. Thank you very much – Vielen Dank – and enjoy the evening.