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18 new Biosphere Reserves added to UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme

Dresden, 30 June - The International Coordinating Council of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB), meeting in Dresden (Germany) from 28 June to 1 July, has added 18 new sites to the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR), which now numbers 580 sites in 14 countries.

Biosphere Reserves were inscribed in Lithuania, Maldives, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Togo for the first time this year. Meanwhile, Australia decided to withdraw Macquarie Island from the World Network of Biosphere Reserves because the site is uninhabited by humans and human presence has been a criterion for inclusion in the Network since 1995.

Brief descriptions of the new sites follow:

Bras d'Or Lake, Canada, is located in Nova Scotia and encompasses a salt-water estuary watershed "inland sea" with three passages to the Atlantic Ocean. The nomination for the site was the result of a highly collaborative process involving First Nation representatives, provincial and federal government agencies, citizens and academics. The stakeholders are working together within the "Bras d'Or Lake Biosphere Reserve Association", which was created in 2005. This process led to the development of a comprehensive management plan for the lake. Over 14,000 people live in this area, implementing initiatives that are creating new jobs and encouraging business opportunities, while demonstrating concrete solutions to the challenges of sustainable development.

Mao'er Mountain, China, features a mountain landscape of exceptional scenic beauty, with peaks reaching over 2,000 m above sea level. The site has an abundance of sub-tropical broad-leaved, coniferous and bamboo forests and provides the habitat for two rare, endemic salamander and frog species (*Hynobius Mao'er Mountainensis* and *Rana Mao'er Mountainensis*). The biosphere reserve is inhabited by Han Chinese and various ethnic minorities (including Miao, Yao, Zhuang, Dong, Yi and Hui) displaying a rich cultural diversity in the area. Thanks to a Global Environment Facility (GEF) funded project, environmental protection and sustainable economic activities, including eco-tourism, have been well developed in the area.

Corredor Biológico Nevados de Chillán-Laguna del Laja, Chile, is located in the northern part of the Patagonia region within the Central Chilean zone which is a global biodiversity hotspot, also characterized by an abundance of endemic species. The biological corridor connects three core areas.

Songor, Ghana, covers a total area of 51,113 ha within the southern coastal zone of Ghana. It is characterized by a unique combination of brackish/estuarine, freshwater

and marine ecosystems with mangroves, islands and small patches of community protected forests. Some portions of the marine ecosystem serve as breeding sites for fish, turtle and migratory birds. The major sources of livelihood for communities in and around the site are subsistence farming, fishing and salt mining. The main settlement, Ada Foah, is already renowned for its tourism activity, but has great and largely untapped potential for further development. The opportunity to develop the cultural and ecotourism sectors in the area makes the site competitive as a model for sustainable development.

Mujib, Jordan, is part of the Dead Sea basin and Jordan Rift Valley landscape, extending along the eastern shores of the Dead Sea. The spectacular landscape of the area includes the lowest terrestrial point on earth (420 m below sea level). Human activities have played a certain role in shaping many of the reserve's habitats, including agriculture, fishing, hunting, grazing, quarrying in small areas at the reserve's boundaries, small scale settlements, wood cutting for fuel and collection of herbal and medicinal plants. The area has more than 90 rare plant species at the national level, one fish species endemic to the Dead Sea Basin and 24 species of mammals of national, regional and global conservation importance.

Zuvintas, Lithuania, is located in the southern part of the Middle Lithuanian Lowlands. It represents approximately 59,000 ha and includes lakes, wetlands, mires, peatbogs, and pine tree stands. Its great variety of habitats and vegetation renders this location very rich in biodiversity. The biosphere reserve is slated to be given a special status in national nature conservation legislation. The main human activities include agriculture, forestry and fishing, with the recent development of eco-farming and tourism. The area has a population of about 11,000, comprising a mixture of large and small land owners.

Baa Atoll, Maldives, harbours globally significant biodiversity in its numerous reefs and demonstrates a long history of human interaction with the environment. Covering approximately 139,700 ha of coastal/marine areas, the site is representative of the Maldives' high diversity of reef animals, with stony and soft corals, reef associated fish species, marine turtles, manta rays and whale sharks. In addition to its 12,170 inhabitants, some 350,000 tourists visit the biosphere reserve annually. As part of a Global Environment Facility (GEF) project, the site has great potential for demonstrating sustainable development throughout the Maldives and the region, while relying on a green economy.

Berlangas archipelago, Portugal, includes the Berlangas, a group of small islands and rocks, and the city of Peniche on the mainland. The archipelago is regularly visited by tourists, fishermen and scientists leaving from Peniche to explore its unique geophysical and ecological settings. Peniche stakeholders help to manage the biosphere reserve, promoting the sustainable development and conservation of the islands.

Volga-Akhtuba Floodplain, Russian Federation, comprises a unique ecosystem, situated in the Volga valley. The Volga-Akhtuba represents a mosaic structure of different landscapes, with high-yielding floodplain meadows, spawning grounds, oak

groves and internationally important wetlands. With a population of some 45,000 permanent inhabitants, the site boasts important historical and cultural heritage in the region. The main economic activities include agriculture and fishing, tourism, and recreational use.

St. Mary's, Saint Kitts and Nevis, is an important site in terms of biological diversity, comprising cloud forests, mangroves and coral reefs. It includes Brimstone Hill Fortress National Park World Heritage site, which is of particular historical, cultural and architectural significance. It represents one of the first Biosphere Reserves of the small Caribbean island countries and could serve as an example of village participation in preserving the outstanding mosaic of natural and cultural landscape values.

Blekinge Archipelago, Sweden, includes most of the coastal areas and archipelagos of Blekinge in the southeast of Sweden. With over 200,000 ha, the biosphere reserve comprises landscapes of granite coastline with the accompanying archipelago containing a variety of islands and islets. The area is marked by a rich natural and cultural heritage, as well as the strong commitment of local people to maintain the social and economic dynamics of the region through innovative thinking and entrepreneurship, alongside the development of energy efficient and environmentally friendly technologies. Joint research is being carried out by municipalities and universities on the sustainable use of coastal resources.

Nedre Dalälven River Landscape, Sweden, covers 308,000 ha with a mixture of wetlands, rivers, lakes, flood plains and productive forests. It includes Lake Hovran and Färnebofjärden Bay Ramsar site. The region boasts high biodiversity, while the river forms a clear border zone between the northern and southern flora and fauna of Northern Europe. Agriculture and forestry activities have evolved as a result of changes in the steel and iron industries. More than 100 'Leader+ projects' designed for sustainable development testify to the high dynamism of the region. The biosphere reserve benefits from a highly participatory governance system as well as numerous partnerships with universities and research centres for environmental monitoring.

Oti-Keran/Oti-Mandouri, Togo. The Biosphere Reserve complex, including Keran National Park and the '*Reserve de Faune l'Oti-Mandouri*', covers 179,000 ha, with 16,710 inhabitants in the northern part of the country. The Oti-Keran/Oti-Mandouri Biosphere Reserve is a key area, helping to maintain the connection between Oti-Keran and WAP complexes - W (Niger), Arly (Burkina-Faso) and the Pendjari National Park (Benin), acting as a transboundary migratory corridor for elephants and other big mammals, such as buffalo. The Oti-Keran/Oti-Mandouri Bisophere Reserve encompasses various ecosystems, including shrubland, savannas, forest galleries, and grasslands. Communities have been involved in the design and management of the reserve, especially monitoring activities. Research is being carried out in collaboration with national and international universities, focusing on the dynamics of ecosystem and biodiversity evolution as well as socio- and socio-cultural issues.

Roztochya, Ukraine, covers a total area of 74,800 ha with agriculture, stock-breeding and fish farming as its main economic activities. The site is located on the north-western edge of the Podillya Upland, 20 km from the city of Lviv, with an area of 30,000 ha. The site attracts visitors to its sanatoria and there are plans for developing business and tourism. There is on-going and planned cooperation with Poland in the Roztochya region.

Bura'a, Yemen, is named after the region's impressive granite massif, Jabal Bura'a. Ranging from 200 – 2,200 m in altitude, Bura'a is a rugged mountainous area intersected by several deep valleys rich in rare, vulnerable and endemic plant species. The site also provides habitat for a diverse fauna, including a large number of bird species and several reptiles, such as fresh water turtles and the Yemeni monitor lizard. Traditional agro forestry systems still provide an important source of income for local communities.

Santana Madeira, Portugal. This new biosphere reserve is the first in the Madeira Archipelago. Despite an active tourist industry, agriculture dominates the economy of local communities. The site features a rich fauna and flora that incorporates a high degree of endemism. and an integral representation of the most relevant ecological units of Madeira, from the marine and coastal ecosystems to the high altitude vegetation, through the laurel forest. The Madeira Archipelago is part of the Macaronesian region, which also includes the Canary and Azores islands, home to several island biosphere reserves.

Ramot Menashe, Israel The biosphere reserve encompasses a mosaic of ecological systems that represent the Mediterranean Basin's version of the global "evergreen sclerophyllous forests, woodlands and scrub" ecosystem types. This 17, 000 ha site is managed by the Meggido Regional Council, and was established after an intense, innovative bottom up process, which involved 13 agricultural settlements and 10,000 inhabitants. It comprises the Meggido World Heritage Site and has on going cooperation with the adjacent Mount Carmel Biosphere Reserve. The biosphere reserve functions as a pilot site for sustainable development practices which could be adopted by other dryland biosphere reserves. Several sustainable development practices in this rural area are in place such as drip irrigation with mostly recycled treated wastewater collected from the biosphere reserve's rural settlements, and maintainance of the integrity of the "batha" ecosystems while generating sustainable income derived from a pastoral livelihood.

Trifinio Fraternidad Biosphere Reserve, El Salvador/Guatemala/Honduras is the first tri-national biosphere reserve in Central America. It is considered a major contribution to the implementation of the Mesoamerican Corridor and is home to an elevated number of endemic species that inhabit the tropical humid forest. It has cross-border core areas that allow for the protection of large parts of tropical forest across national boundaries. The biosphere reserve also gives birth to the Lempa River, which crosses the three countries before reaching the Pacific Ocean. Three million people depend on the waters of the River for their livelihood. The management of this new

biosphere reserve is coordinated by the Plan Trifinio, an interstate coordination agency, which is under the direct supervision of Vice Presidents of the three countries concerned.

Extensions or changes in zonation of a biosphere reserve

Cat Tien, Viet Nam, is the new name of the former Dong Nai Biosphere Reserve, which was designated in 2001. Two new core zones have been added to the site, bringing its total area to 966,563 ha. The rationale for the extension of the site is based on the challenges posed by socio-economic development. Under the guidance of the People's Committee of Dong Nai Province, increased collaboration among different stakeholders will help to strengthen coordination and management processes for the entire biosphere reserve, thus reconciling multi-goal conservation and development objectives.

The MAB Programme has been pioneering a scientific basis for sustainable development for 40 years. Biosphere reserves are places recognized by MAB where local communities are actively involved in governance and management, research, education, training and monitoring at the service of both socio-economic development and biodiversity conservation. They are thus sites for experimenting with and learning about sustainable development.

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Photos of the new reserves are available at:

http://www.unesco.org/new/fr/media-services/multimedia/photos/mab-2011/

More about the MAB Programme:

http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/ecological-sciences/man-and-biosphere-programme/