

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

I am always delighted to be able to pay tribute to the driving forces of Birdlife International and the work that you do. It was with great pleasure that I accepted my dear friend Marco Lambertini's invitation.

Even though it is a long way to come from Monaco to attend a cocktail party, I would say that the quality of the work that you do more than deserves a few hours' travel !

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Your institution has a clear vision and is effective. It is a model that can be an inspiration for much action, including the work of my foundation.

First of all – your achievements. We are honoured to be partners in some of them and to work with you on the preservation of several emblematic species.

I am of course thinking of the albatrosses and petrels in the Indian Ocean. These mythical birds are being decimated by boulder fishing. I am also thinking of other joint programmes – the protection of the bearded vulture, Bonelli's eagle and the Mediterranean Bald Ibis.

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The influence of your institution extends beyond these specific projects, of which I have given just a few examples among so many others. For decades, Birdlife has been playing an irreplaceable role, raising awareness and sounding the alarm for public opinion and decision-makers.

Well before environmental challenges were on the international agenda, you drew attention to the vital issue of biodiversity that had not yet been defined as such. We now know, in particular thanks to you, that this does not just involve a few endangered species all over the world, but that it is a key element in the balance of our planet and the lives of each and every one of us.

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This year is devoted to biodiversity, which is finally being viewed as the guarantor of a crucial balance in a planet whose limits we now understand and that is, more than anything else, vulnerable and precious.

In this regard, your work forms part of a global undertaking. This is exemplified in the conservation and restoration projects “Forest of Hope” that you are running in several tropical forests around the world, in particular in Sumatra and Cambodia where several exceptional species are now, thanks to you, better known and above all, let us hope, on the way to being saved.

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Beyond these individual species, your work allows whole areas to be protected and preserved – unique areas of the globe whose importance is key both for our survival and for our knowledge of the world.

The Sumatra programme, that involves several partners from different countries as well as Birdlife International, has inspired other similar initiatives in Indonesia. It demonstrates once again the essential role played by Birdlife in terms of initiative and innovation.

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It is for this reason that I am particularly pleased that my Foundation, whose commitment to biodiversity and more generally protection of the planet is a faithful partner of Birdlife International and has signed a framework partnership with you allowing our efforts to be united and our approaches to be shared on several projects throughout the world.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

I was just talking about the crucial balance that should unite the species living on our common planet. At a time when our world is beset with worry and so many tragedies, this necessity may sometimes be felt secondary, or even superfluous. Nevertheless, I believe that it has never been so important or so much at the fore.

The many crises affecting us today of course have different origins and causes. Economic, financial, food and health crises but also various geopolitical tensions – each of these scourges is embedded in its own dynamic.

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They all, however, have their genesis in the tragic tendency of our civilization to be selfish and to think in the short term.

Actually, it seems to me that the cause of biodiversity can play a major role in opening the people's consciousness.

Not only because all of us can instinctively measure the irreversible drama represented by the disappearance of every plant or animal species. Above all because the question of biodiversity obliges us to think outside the box, to find imaginative solutions and to overcome egocentric temptations which too often blind us to reality.

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Overcoming current crises and creating a truly sustainable world will in many respects involve profound changes in the way we live, travel, consume and work.

The philosophical revolution that lies ahead was summed up by the Greek poet Heraclitus in these words: “there is a greater need to extinguish excess than an outbreak of fire”.

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Thanks to you, thanks to the resolute and unswerving work that has been carried out by Birdlife for almost a century, today we can hope, if not to extinguish excess, at least to make each person understand how dangerous it is, both for birds and for human beings. This is essential progress and I attach great importance to expressing my praise for the work that you do.

Thank you.