BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL’S ASKS FOR UNFCCC COP21

Background

The climate change talks in Paris (UNFCCC COP21) are the culmination of several years of negotiations towards the adoption of a global climate agreement. They are an important crossroad: A weak or non-agreement, as we saw in Copenhagen in 2009, could result in a temperature rise well over 4°C by the end of the century, destabilising entire economies, disrupting ecological processes, and driving species to extinction. A strong agreement could catalyse global action on climate change that holds average global temperature rise under 2 degree Celsius, and helps nature and people deal with the impacts of climate change.

Climate change is one of the greatest challenges facing society today. It poses a significant and growing risk to nature and people and undermines efforts to achieve sustainable development. An effective agreement in Paris would help reduce this risk and mutually reinforce the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development adopted earlier this year by transforming unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, correcting inequities, strengthening governance and delivering a range of social, economic and environmental benefits.

BirdLife International believes that to be effective the agreement must recognise the critical role of nature-based solutions for both mitigation and adaptation, as well as safeguard and enhance the resilience of natural ecosystems. This document outlines the importance of nature in the Paris Agreement and accompanying Decisions of the Conference of the Parties (hereafter collectively “Paris package”), and presents BirdLife International’s key asks for COP21.

Why nature has an important place in the new agreement

- The degradation and conversion of natural ecosystems is a major source of greenhouse gas emissions. Protecting, maintaining and restoring natural ecosystems is a proven, immediate and cost-effective approach for mitigating climate change, providing both emission reductions and removal of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. Such nature-based solutions for mitigation also deliver a number of co-benefits such as enhanced resilience of ecosystems and local communities.

- Healthy ecosystems provide people with a natural defence against hazards such as flooding, sea-level rise and drought. They also provide people with important goods and services that underpin...
their livelihoods, including food, clean water and pollination services. Climate-smart conservation, restoration and sustainable management of ecosystems can therefore form an important component of adaptation strategies. However, the current scale of investment in and application of such ecosystem-based approaches to adaptation is grossly inadequate.

- Climate change has already had negative impacts on ecosystems and species on every continent. While ambitious mitigation action is essential and will help reduce the pressure on nature, some further impacts are inevitable requiring urgent action to enhance the resilience of ecosystems and help species adapt.

- Climate change mitigation actions can pose unacceptable risks to nature and people if they are poorly planned. For example, large-scale hydropower dams on main stem rivers can be one of the most ecologically harmful forms of development, while bioenergy expansion has been linked to conversion of natural habitats, as well as competition for land, wood resources and water, food insecurity, and in some cases even increased emissions.

- Climate change adaptation responses can have negative impacts on ecosystems. This leads to maladaptation, where an adaptation measure unintentionally increases rather than decreases the vulnerability of ecosystems and/or the people who depend upon them.

**BirdLife’s asks**

**Mitigation**

1. **BirdLife international calls for a COP21 Decision to increase efforts to cut greenhouse gas emissions pre-2020, including through mitigation actions in the forest sector.** To prevent potentially catastrophic global temperature increases, greenhouse gas emissions need to peak before 2020. Action must be accelerated and scaled up immediately – we cannot wait until the new agreement comes into force in 2020. Activities in the forest sector can make a significant and cost-effective contribution to mitigation efforts in the short-term as well as post-2020.

2. **BirdLife International calls for Parties to adopt an ambitious and measurable long-term mitigation goal in the Paris Agreement.** While the global temperature goal is an important component of long-term mitigation commitments and should be anchored in the agreement, it is not sufficient: there is a time lag between emissions and resulting temperature increase. BirdLife believes that in addition to the global temperature goal, Parties should commit to reach by 2050 at least a 40-70 per cent reduction on 2010 levels in greenhouse gas emissions globally and near-or-below-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2100, in line with recommendations of the 5th Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. This would establish a shared objective towards which all countries collectively strive and a common understanding of
the scale of efforts needed by each country. BirdLife recognises the importance of reviewing and adjusting as necessary the mitigation goal on the basis of best available scientific knowledge.

3. **The Agreement should establish a process or mechanism to review, assess and where necessary ratchet up national contributions on a five yearly basis.** The conditions under which the Agreement will operate are in constant flux: science is advancing, technology is developing and the socio-economic status of countries is changing. A ratchet mechanism should be established to enable national commitments to be scaled-up in line with historic and evolving responsibilities and capabilities, and in light of progress towards the global goal.

4. **BirdLife calls for a strong governance framework for market mechanisms to ensure transparency and effectiveness,** including rules to prevent double counting. BirdLife recognises that allowing the transfer of international units can play an important role in increasing the cost-effectiveness and scale of mitigation efforts and land-based mitigation approaches such as reforestation. However, it is critical that the use of market mechanisms enhances ambition rather than delaying action to decarbonize economies.

5. **BirdLife International calls for governments to explicitly integrate the land sector into the 2015 Agreement.** Anthropogenic GHG emissions from agriculture, forestry and other land use currently total around 10-12 GtCO2-eq per year, making it the second largest source of anthropogenic GHG emissions after the energy sector. Action in the land-use sector can provide an immediate and cost-effective contribution to mitigation efforts, and needs to be catalysed through explicit mention in the 2015 Agreement.

6. **The 2015 Agreement should endorse and reaffirm the critical role of Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD-Plus).** REDD-plus has a huge potential to deliver substantial emissions reductions in the short, medium and long-term whilst providing important non-carbon benefits. Despite this potential and having finalised the governance framework for REDD+, REDD+ investment and operationalisation is lacking. Explicit recognition of REDD+ in the Agreement will give governments the reassurance they need to pursue REDD+. This is especially important for poorer and smaller countries not yet ready to participate in results-based REDD+.

7. **The Paris package must set up a process to elaborate on the rules and principles governing land sector accounting.** Common accounting rules for the land sector are critical for assessing comparability of effort. They need to be comprehensive and complete, so that nations “account for what the atmosphere sees” in terms of emissions and removals. There should be a requirement for all countries to report on and account for emissions and removals from agriculture, forestry and other land use (“AFOLU”), with special allowances for countries with least capacity (e.g. Least Developed Countries). The principles that govern the rules could be agreed in Paris and the detailed rules negotiated afterwards.
8. The Paris package should prioritise mitigation actions in the land use sector that protect, maintain or restore natural ecosystems and build climate resilience. Parties should be encouraged to develop and report information on how mitigation actions in the land sector are contributing to or undermining other social and environmental objectives, in a similar way as countries report on how they are addressing and respecting environmental and social safeguards under REDD+. Paris COP21 should initiate a process to develop guidelines on this.

**Adaptation and Loss & Damage**

9. BirdLife calls for Parties to promote adaptation efforts pre-2020 through financial and technical support for and implementation of National Adaptation Programmes of Action and National Adaptation Plans. Climate change is already having severe impacts and efforts to adapt need to be scaled up immediately.

10. BirdLife recommends the Paris 2015 Agreement establish a global adaptation goal to reduce vulnerability and build the resilience of communities and ecosystems to the impacts of climate change. A global goal in the Paris Agreement would send an international signal on the importance of investing in adaptation, and integrating adaptation into development planning. Achieving this goal should be recognised as a common responsibility for all Parties.

11. The Paris package should catalyse progress on National Adaptation Plans, and facilitate enhanced knowledge and lesson sharing. It should support the full implementation of the Cancun Adaptation Framework (established in Cancun, COP16), and enhance rather than duplicate existing processes and institutions (e.g. Adaptation Committee and Least Developed Country Expert Group) for adaptation under the UNFCCC. BirdLife would also encourage a regular review of the institutional arrangements to determine whether there are any gaps, redundancies or inefficiencies that could be addressed.

12. The 2015 Agreement must recognise the adaptation needs of ecosystems, and encourage all countries to take actions to reduce the vulnerability and increase the resilience of ecosystems to climate change. Climate change has already had significant impacts on biodiversity and further efforts are needed to help minimise these today and in the future.

13. All governments should commit to social and environmental principles and robust safeguards for adaptation planning, investment and implementation. Principles should include gender equity, participation, promotion of human rights and maintenance or enhancement of ecological resilience and integrity. Without such a commitment there is a risk that adaptation actions will perversely undermine other social, economic and environmental goals and lead to maladaptation.

14. Ecosystem-based adaptation should be explicitly recognised in the Agreement. Ecosystem-based approaches for adaptation (EbA) can from a critical component of adaptation strategies.
There is a need to scale up financial and technical support for ecosystem-based adaptation approaches and more comprehensively integrate these approaches into national adaptation plans. Recognition within the Agreement will help raise the profile of EbA and catalyse investment.

15. **Richer countries should commit to ramping up both financial and technical support for adaptation.** This must include support to assist countries to monitor and evaluate adaptation action and outcomes. Provisions to scale up adaptation support are critical, particularly for Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States.

16. **A commitment by all Parties to regularly communicate progress and plans for national adaptation** to the UNFCCC. This could be done through, for example, National Adaptation Plans, NDCs, and National Communications, and could serve as a basis for scaling up adaptation action and support.

17. **BirdLife International calls for Parties to anchor loss and damage within the 2015 Agreement.** In some cases, it will be impossible to adapt to all the effects of climate change and there will be inevitable loss (e.g. of human lives, species or ecosystems) and damage (e.g. to infrastructure). BirdLife calls for a strong commitment from governments to address loss and damage, including of biodiversity and ecosystem services, along with recognition that inadequate mitigation and insufficient adaptation will lead to more loss and damage and further need for financial and technical support to address this.

**Finance**

18. **The Paris package should include commitments to scale up mitigation and adaptation finance to levels sufficient for achieving nationally determined contributions and ultimately the global mitigation and adaptation goals.** Finance needs to be adequate, predictable and sustainable, and be scaled up immediately if governments and business are to confidently take the action necessary to transition to low-carbon, climate resilient development. Governments should seek to mobilise climate finance from a variety of public and private sources.

19. **BirdLife calls governments to demonstrate how they intend to scale up public finance to meet the financial commitment of USD 100 billion new and additional climate finance per year by 2020 and establish five-year targets and provisions for public finance in the post-2020 Agreement.**

20. **BirdLife urges governments to make commitments to ensure financial support for mitigation and adaptation actions does not go towards high-emission or maladaptive investments.** For example, international support for renewable energy development should not result in the conversion of natural ecosystems or undermine the resilience of local communities.
Transparency

21. BirdLife calls governments to adopt a robust transparency framework, including monitoring, reporting and verification for all climate action. BirdLife believes that transparency is critical for the success of the 2015 Agreement: transparency builds trust between Parties, helps hold them to account, and enables assessment of progress towards targets for mitigation, adaptation and means of implementation (finance, technology development and transfer and capacity building).

BirdLife International is an active member of the Climate Action Network and the REDD-Safeguard Working Group and contributes to their COP21 positions:

- CAN Position:  
- REDD-SWG Position:  
  www.reddplussafeguards.com

BirdLife International’s full policy position on climate change can be found here:


For further information about BirdLife’s Asks and events that BirdLife will be participating in at UNFCCC, please contact:

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