



For Immediate Release
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World Wilderness Congress issues statement calling for wilderness protection as a key strategy to reverse climate change and conserve biodiversity

The Merida Message aimed at Copenhagen UN Climate Change Conference

Merida, Mexico -- The Chairman and Executive Committee of the 9th World Wilderness Congress (WILD9) issued today **The Merida Message** (*Mensaje de Merida*) calling for the protection of critical land and sea wilderness areas to mitigate climate change and conserve biodiversity and healthy ecosystems that provide products and services vital to human well-being.

The Merida Messages states that runaway carbon emissions are driving the climate towards irreversible tipping points, we are contaminating our planet with pervasive toxicity, destroying the diversity of life on our planet, exhausting freshwater supplies and causing acidification in our oceans, and over-exploiting our oceans, causing fisheries to collapse. As a result, we are deepening poverty, weakening social structures and threatening global security. This situation is in stark contrast to the world we can have if wilderness and its contribution to natural life support systems are properly valued and protected. Wilderness sustains us, generating the essential services that make possible our economic and social prosperity, our physical health and our spiritual well-being. Our essential choice – indeed, the imperative – has never been clearer.

Approximately 70% of the greenhouse gases emitted by humans in the past 250 years come from burning fossil fuels and 30% of emissions come from deforestation and land-use change. The Merida Message supports current focus on reducing fossil fuel emissions, but calls for new measures to protect forests, wetlands, grasslands, and peatlands, which store large amounts of carbon, which is released into the atmosphere when they are degraded or converted to other uses. The Merida Message makes specific recommendations and calls to action for wilderness protection to be included in policy developed at the Copenhagen United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in December.

The Merida Message calls for a reversal of the destruction of the ocean's vegetated habitats, including mangroves, salt marshes and sea grasses, because of the large amount of carbon storage they enable. Recent research shows that these habitats account for at least 50% of all carbon stored in ocean sediments. It makes recommendations for the

urgent protection of key ocean areas to halt destruction of fisheries and marine ecosystems.

The Merida Message also calls for the UNFCCC and Convention on Biodiversity Diversity (CBD), which currently operate separately, to integrate their respective efforts to develop and implement climate change and biodiversity conservation solutions.

“Wilderness protection on land and sea is key to both of these missions and the UNFCCC and CBD must work in a coordinated and urgent manner to facilitate protecting wilderness around the world,” said WILD9 Chairman Exequiel Ezcurra.

In an important display of unity and support, several key conservation organizations have signed The Merida Message, and the chair and executive committee of WILD9 invite other organizations and individuals to sign The Merida Message during the weeks leading up to Copenhagen, where it will be presented.

Signatories to The Merida Message include:

The WILD Foundation, Unidos para la Conservacion, The Wilderness Foundation Africa, The Wilderness Foundation UK, Conservation International, Naturalia, Reforestamos Mexico, Sanctuary Asia, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Canadian Boreal Initiative, Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative,

To sign The Merida Message, please contact Emily Loose at emily@wild.org

Please send **requests for images** to media contacts below.

For a copy of **The Merida Message** and to learn more about WILD9 go to <http://www.wild9.org>.

WILD9 is a partnership between The WILD Foundation and Unidos para la Conservación and relies on the support and participation of many partner organizations.

Begun in 1977, **The World Wilderness Congress** (www.wild9.org) is the longest-running global public forum and is held approximately every four years. WILD9 runs from Nov. 6 -13, 2009 in Merida Mexico, and incorporates a diverse range of views from academia, government, private sector, science, native peoples, the arts, media and social sciences on the importance and benefits of protecting wild nature and related strategies and success stories.

The WILD Foundation (www.wild.org) Founded in 1974, WILD is the only international organization dedicated entirely and explicitly to wilderness protection around the world. WILD works to protect the planet's last wild places and the wildlife and people who depend upon them, because wilderness areas provide essential social, spiritual, biological and economic benefits. We believe that intact wilderness areas are an essential core element of a healthy modern society.

Unidos para la Conservación (www.undiosparalaconservacion.org) Founded in 1992, Unidos is a nonprofit Mexican conservation organization that has actively promoted the concept of wilderness conservation in Mexico. Its working strategy combines the establishment of alliances with government, nonprofit and corporate partners with the promotion of a conservation culture through publications and films in a search of conservation solutions through specific action.

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