

Day 1 – 24 August 2009 – 12:30 pm

**Keynote address on Congress Theme 2** (Conservation and Rehabilitation of Natural Resources).

**Environmental resilience and agroforestry** - Dr. Richard Leakey, Chairman, Wildlife Direct,

Water is at the heart of the crisis facing Africa today, emphasized Dr. Richard Leakey, and agroforestry provides some of the tools for restoring tropical aquifers which have been destroyed by years of deforestation and poor land management. Dr. Leakey, Chairman of Wildlife Direct, and lifelong conservationist and activist, also pointed to the limitations of technologies for restoring ecosystems, and suggested that we must control destructive human activities before trying to control nature.

Climate change scientists have long focused on rising temperatures, but the effects of temperature on precipitation in the tropics will be the real problem in Africa, said Dr. Leakey. Giving examples from Kenya, Dr. Leakey pointed to human activities that have long degraded aquifers and are therefore undermining any attempts to adapt to climate change impacts, or build a sustainable way of life. Despite high seasonal rainfall and flash flooding, natural water capture in Kenya has been minimal. This is exacerbated by uncontrolled hydroelectric schemes and abstraction of water through boreholes. Water banks, towers and catchments, which require healthy forests to function, are also not sufficiently valued.

When restoration does become a priority, manmade technologies for reforestation cannot truly mimic nature's complex restoration process. In Kenya's Aberdare mountains, what is now a forested national park used to be farmland. After the area became protected it eventually naturally reverted to a healthy forest ecosystem. "This is an example of nature doing its job remarkably quickly and effectively," said Dr. Leakey. Technological interventions are not enough to bring a forest or an ecosystem back to life. Dr. Leakey warned against "becoming so expert that you kill off nature's ability to heal itself. We need to control our species to do less harm, rather than trying to control nature."