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## 100 statements arise from conservation summit

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Hawaii organizers of the World Conservation Congress are still smiling from a successful gathering that brought more than 10,000 delegates from 192 countries to Honolulu from Sept. 1 through Saturday for the largest such event ever.

Three years ago Hawaii's bid to host the World Conservation Congress was initially rejected. But the delegation from the islands didn't let it drop, rallying to persuade the U.S. State Department and President Barack Obama to ultimately lend their support.

"I imagine they're very grateful Hawaii persevered," said Oahu biologist Steven Lee Montgomery, who was part of the group that traveled to Jeju, South Korea, to persuade the IUCN to hold its next major four-year event in Honolulu. Montgomery carried 400 tiny bottles of Hawaii island lehua honey with him to help sweeten the deal.

The runner-up, with strong governmental backing of its own, was Istanbul, which endured a failed military coup in July and is still experiencing violence and unrest in its wake.

In tranquil Hawaii, meanwhile, there were no problems with security as the delegates from a wide range of governments and nongovernmental organizations buckled down to make some key decisions on some controversial issues, including the closure of domestic markets for elephant ivory, protecting the high seas and urging off-limits areas for industrial activities within protected areas.

In all, more than 100 resolutions and recommendations were adopted by IUCN members, calling on third parties to take action on a range of conservation issues.

Among them were two Hawaii-related motions: supporting Native Hawaiians through community-based natural resource management and calling for increased conservation efforts to help save Hawaii's threatened birds.

IUCN resolutions do not carry the weight of law, but the sheer number of members — 217 state and government agencies and 1,066 NGOs supported by 16,000 experts worldwide — make the event a key platform for creating and executing treaties and legislation.

Honolulu consultant Trisha Kehaulani Watson, a veteran World Conservation Congress attendee, said delegates got more work done and took some bold moves in part because it was held in the U.S. and Hawaii, in particular.

“I believe the people who came here were inspired by Hawaii’s environment and Hawaii’s people. I heard that time and time again,” Watson said.

IUCN Director General Inger Andersen said that some of the world’s greatest minds met in Honolulu to decide on “the most urgent action” needed to ensure the long-term survival of life on Earth.

“This IUCN Congress has come at a pivotal time in our planet’s history as we find ourselves at a crossroad, facing challenges of unprecedented magnitude,” Andersen told the delegates on the last day of the conference. “Today we leave Hawaii equipped with a much clearer road map for advancing on the post-2015 agenda, confident that we have taken our first steps on the road to a sustainable future where nature and human progress support each other.”

The legacy of the World Conservation Congress, among other things, will live on in a document known as the Hawaii Commitments.

Approved on the final day, the document is a statement that summarizes the key issues, aspirations, initiatives and outcomes of the gathering. Titled “Navigating Island Earth,” the document was shaped by debates and deliberations during the conference and opened for comment to all of the participants.

“It’s a living document,” said state Rep. Ryan Yamane, (D, Mililani-Waipio-Waikale). “It will help the delegates move to the next step.”

Organizers say it offers a commitment to address some of the greatest challenges facing nature conservation and calls on those who attended the conference to transform the world. It addresses issues such as sustaining food supplies, maintaining the health of the oceans, wildlife trafficking, engaging with the private sector and building resilience to climate change.

The document calls for protecting vast sections of the ocean and points to the expansion of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument just as the conference was about to start.

Hawaii, it says, set the example for the 2016 World Conservation Congress by infusing it with the aloha spirit and the tradition of living in harmony with nature.

“Aloha aina, an inherent part of the traditions and customs of Native Hawaiians, embodies the mutual respect for one another and a commitment of service to the natural world,” it says. “Embodying aloha aina globally will help address the tremendous environmental challenges we face.”

Yamane read the statement at the conference. When the reading was finished, the participants rose to their feet in applause.

“The feedback I heard from people is that they loved Hawaii. They loved the aloha spirit,” said Yamane, chairman of the state House Water and Land Committee. “People really could see the connection between the people and the land.”

Watson said Hawaii was serious about the conference and it showed. She said a high bar has been set for the next IUCN World Conservation Congress, which will take place in 2020. A location has not been announced yet.