



**Press Brief**

**Hopes brighten for inscription of the Western Ghats, India as UNESCO's World Heritage Site**

India had submitted the nomination dossier for inscription of 39 serial sites in the Western Ghats in the States of Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Paris in February 2010. As per the Operational Guidelines of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, the nomination dossier was peer-reviewed by IUCN experts and thereafter an IUCN Technical Evaluation Mission visited the Western Ghats in October 2010. Based on the inputs received through desk reviews and field mission, the IUCN recommended to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee (WHC) to '*defer*' the consideration of India's proposal in its 35<sup>th</sup> Session in Paris from 19-29<sup>th</sup> June, 2011. '*Deferral*' means request for more information, revisit of IUCN Technical Evaluation mission and submission of revised nomination dossier by the State Party-India. In nutshell, '*Deferral*' means starting the process *de-novo*.

India's official delegation to the 35<sup>th</sup> Session of the WHC comprising Dr Jagdish Kishwan, Additional Director General of Forests (Wildlife), Shri A.K.Srivastava, Inspector General of Forests (Wildlife), MoEF and Dr Vinod B.Mathur, Dean, Wildlife Institute of India prepared India's brief against IUCN recommendation on '*deferral*' and interacted with the delegations of the 21 Member World Heritage Committee to highlight the strengths of India's proposal. Based on the technical arguments put forward by the Indian delegation, several members of the WHC got convinced of the merits of India's proposal and decided to go for the option of '*referral*' instead of '*deferral*'. The Australian delegation formally moved a proposal to the WHC seeking amendment of the draft decision. When the matter came up for discussion, 11 countries led by Egypt and Brazil and followed by Australia, Bahrain, Barbados, Cambodia, China, Jordan, Nigeria, Russia and South Africa came out strongly in support of '*referral*'. Indian delegation also aptly responded to a range of questions, clarifications and amplifications sought by the members of WHC. Based on the strength of response offered by the Indian delegation and the overwhelming support to Australian proposal to amend the draft decision, **the World Heritage Committee decided to amend the decision of '*deferral*' to '*referral*'**. This means that the Ministry of Environment and Forests will have to provide only additional information sought in the revised decision and mainly pertaining to governance/coordination mechanisms to synergies management activities of the 39 sites; buffer zone/connectivity etc. '*Referral*' means that there will be no need to submit a revised nomination dossier and there shall be no new IUCN Technical Evaluation Mission to the Western Ghats.

The Ministry of Environment and Forests would now be submitting the additional information requested for by the World Heritage Committee, based on which the World Heritage Committee will take a decision to inscribe all 39 serial sites of the Western Ghats on the World Heritage List in its 36<sup>th</sup> Session in Bangkok, Thailand in June-July, 2012, under criteria (x) of UNESCO Operational Guidelines, which means that the site "*contains the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of*



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*biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation”.*

The very positive decision on the Western Ghats by the WHC is a reflection of India's concerted efforts to inscribe the Western Ghats, one of the world's 'hottest hotspot' of biological diversity, on the world heritage list. This Mission has been very ably led by Shri Jairam Ramesh, Minister of State of Environment and Forests (Independent Charge) and technically supported by both government and non-government organizations particularly the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment (ATREE).

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