



**MEDIA RELEASE**

**For immediate release**

## **Future of Myanmar's largest lake secured thanks to new Ramsar Site designation**

***The designation of Lake Indawgyi as a Wetland of International Importance will help to maintain the services and benefits that the site provides for people and the environment.***

*WORLD WETLANDS DAY, 2 FEBRUARY 2016* – Conservationists in Myanmar have a special reason to celebrate World Wetlands Day today, as Indawgyi Lake is officially added to the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance.

Announced by the Myanmar Government and Ramsar Secretariat today, the designation of Indawgyi Lake as a Ramsar Site marks the Myanmar government's commitment to conserve this special area, which supports the livelihood of some 30,000 people and is also home to a great diversity of water birds, fish and reptiles.

According to Dr U Nyi Nyi Kyaw, the Director General of the Forest Department, "The new Ramsar Site will ensure the long-term conservation and wise use of Myanmar's most important wetland, Indawgyi Lake basin, which is only Myanmar's second Ramsar Site. However, the government is committed to designating additional Ramsar Sites to create a national network of protected wetlands."

### **A place for people and wildlife**

Located in northern Myanmar, Indawgyi Lake is the largest natural freshwater lake in Myanmar. The site regularly supports at least 20,000 migratory and resident water birds, including coot, purple swamphen, tufted and ferruginous ducks, lesser whistling ducks and black-headed gulls, to name just a few.

Five globally-threatened turtle and tortoise species are also found here along with 93 fish species, seven of which are endemic to these wetlands and have only recently been discovered to science.

Around 30,000 people live in the lake's basin, most of whom earn a living from the lake through fishing, rice farming, livestock grazing, and extracting forest products from the surrounding watershed.

Some of these practices have been unsustainable, such as overfishing in the lake and firewood extraction in the watershed. "We have been working at Indawgyi Lake since 2010 to address these challenges together with local communities, the Forest Department and the

Department of Fisheries,” said Frank Momberg, Fauna & Flora International’s Myanmar Programme Director.

Firewood extraction and consumption have been reduced through fuel-efficient stoves and community forestry. To improve fisheries management, local communities participated in the designation of fish conservation zones to protect fish breeding and nursery grounds. The Department of Fisheries just approved nine community-managed fish conservation zones, including a ‘no-fishing zone’ around Shwe Myint Zu Pagoda, an iconic cultural building on the western side of the lake.

Indawgyi’s outstanding cultural and natural heritage is attracting an increasing number of tourists. To ensure tourism is sustainable and benefits local people, Fauna & Flora International (FFI) has launched a community-based ecotourism<sup>1</sup> initiative offering new adventures such as kayaking, cycling and trekking – all of which provide jobs for local youth.

According to Frank Momberg, “Local people are often dependent upon wetlands because of the benefits they provide, such as water for drinking and irrigation, as well as in providing food such as fish. It is therefore critical to promote the wise use of wetlands and manage them in collaboration with local communities.”

Despite the good progress for conservation as highlighted by the Ramsar designation, major challenges lay ahead, in particular illegal artisanal gold mining on streams in the watershed, which is causing sedimentation and pollution in the southern part of the lake.

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**Notes to editors:**

1. Deutsche Welle recently published a short film about ecotourism and conservation at Indawgyi Lake: <http://dw.com/p/1HRWF>. The film is funded through the International Climate Initiative of the German Environment Ministry.

**About Fauna & Flora International (FFI) ([www.fauna-flora.org](http://www.fauna-flora.org))**

FFI protects threatened species and ecosystems worldwide, choosing solutions that are sustainable, based on sound science and take account of human needs. Operating in more than 40 countries worldwide, FFI saves species from extinction and habitats from destruction, while improving the livelihoods of local people. Founded in 1903, FFI is the world's longest established international conservation body and a registered charity.