

Press release

For immediate release

## ICLEI member Grande Synthe among winners of Capitals of Biodiversity Awards

*Nagoya Japan, October 28, 2010* – Europe has four new Capitals of Biodiversity, with cities in France, Hungary, Slovakia and Spain recognised for their outstanding efforts in fighting the loss of biodiversity. ICLEI member city Grande Synthe was unveiled as the winner of the French prize. The city has 22,000 inhabitants and is located in the North of France on the North Sea coast. Although it has been pressurised by the many industries located in the surrounding area, the municipality has led an ambitious policy to preserve nature and restore biodiversity within the city. For many years Grande Synthe has chosen to use alternative techniques to manage green spaces in a more ecological way.

The cities of Tata Hungary, El Real Sitio de San Ildefonso Spain, and Želiezovce Slovakia were also announced as the winners in their country. Over 200 municipalities – from small villages such as the Spanish village Carrícola with 88 inhabitants, to European metropolises such as Barcelona and Paris – in all four countries presented their efforts, projects and measures to protect biodiversity at the local level. “The four European Capitals of Biodiversity show a very high standard of biodiversity protection” says Oliver Hillel, Programme Officer at the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and member of the international advisory board of the project. “If many municipalities around the globe take their lead and show a similar dedication, we can finally achieve some significant progress in fighting the loss of biodiversity.”

The competition was open to small to medium sized municipalities as well, with the populations of the winning cities varying from 5,000 to 24,000 - though their scale of commitment and the quality of their projects can set the standard for small villages and large cities alike. The outstanding effort of the winners was recognised at the City Biodiversity Summit, held in parallel to the tenth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP10). More than 500 representatives from local authorities over the world gathered to exchange knowledge on how to preserve local biodiversity and to support the inclusion of cities in the official COP decisions.

Kobie Brand from the ICLEI African Secretariat, one of the organising bodies of the conference, noted that the examples of the four capitals of biodiversity shows that also small municipalities can take leadership in biodiversity preservation. The City Biodiversity Summit’s main focus was to encourage Parties to adopt the Plan of Action on Sub-national Governments, Cities and Local Authorities for Biodiversity (2011-2020), currently under negotiation at the CBD COP. It achieved its goal when the plan was endorsed by Working Group Two of the CBD COP on 26 October.

Other ICLEI members to receive honours at the Capitals of Biodiversity awards include the City of Miskolc (Hungary) who finished first in the category for above 100,000 inhabitants in Hungary and Vitoria-Gasteiz, the newly crowned European Green Capital for 2012, finished top of the category for above 30,000 inhabitants in Spain.

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## **Background:**

**ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability** is an international association of local governments and national and regional local government organisations. ICLEI currently has 1,100 members worldwide and 200 in Europe. Founded in 1990, ICLEI provides technical consulting, training, and information services to build capacity, share knowledge, and support local government in the implementation of sustainable development at the local level.

The **Capitals of Biodiversity** competition rewards villages, towns and cities for innovation, commitment and excellence in preserving the wealth of nature. Local authorities were judged in different size classes and thematic categories including municipal green spaces, planning instruments, protection of species and ecosystems, agriculture and forestry, water management, communication and environmental education. The competitions were accompanied by a series of workshops in each country and the release of printed brochures to present strategies and best-practice examples from the participating municipalities. The “German Capital of Biodiversity” will be announced in spring 2011 and a next round of the competitions will be carried out in 2011.

The competitions in the five countries are implemented by Natureparif (France), Lake Balaton Development Coordination Agency (Hungary), Fundación Biodiversidad (Spain), the Regional Environmental Center (Slovakia) and German Environmental Aid (Germany). The International Union for Conservation of Nature and ICLEI are international partners of the project. More organisations from other European countries are invited to join and establish competitions in their own countries. The project is supported through LIFE, a programme of the EU. Since 1992, LIFE has co-financed some 2.750 projects, contributing approximately 1.35 billion to the protection of the environment.

## **More information:**

Website: [www.iclei-europe.org](http://www.iclei-europe.org)

Website: [www.capital-biodiversity.eu](http://www.capital-biodiversity.eu)

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