

Bio-diplomacy: Recognising and solving environmental problems

Manuel Jose Bonett

Ambassador of Colombia

When making prognoses for the new millennium, journalists, newspapers and politicians all identified three principal issues to be concerned about: economic and social development, democracy and human rights, and nature and the environment. Democracy and social development can be achieved through good laws, good government and good finance. But conservation of the environment and sustainable development are not possible without protecting nature in all its dimensions - the air, water, flora and fauna. The future of humanity depends upon the protection of the environment.

God gave us - not only in Colombia, but across the whole continent of South America - tremendous riches of nature: great rivers, enormous jungles, millions of animals, pure air. Every element, every factor necessary for survival is found in South America. These are a gift from God; yet we seem to be too interested in destroying them. *This* is the problem.

What can be done? Ambassadors, as representatives of governments and people, can influence institutions and modify actions and thoughts in favour of the environment. This is bio-diplomacy; the official actions of diplomats world-wide in order to influence governments, scientists and national institutions towards modifying their policies .

We have serious problems that demand action, like the destruction of the ozone layer - perhaps *the* most serious problem - acid rain, desertification, water contamination, deforestation, nuclear waste, junk in space, toxic waste: all are seriously destroying the quality of our lives. Many of these phenomena are caused by the world's great powers - the advanced countries. We can use our official diplomatic positions to influence governments to protect nature.

What has been done so far? An impressive Biopolitics International Organisation (B.I.O.) conference held in August 1999, in Ancient Olympia, left the participants with the definite feeling that bio-diplomacy is important for governments to protect nature. Almost immediately after the conference, the B.I.O. President, Dr. Vlavianos-Arvanitis, was invited to Colombia where she attended the World Congress on Zero Emissions, and gave lectures at several universities and to young people. Subsequently she visited the Sierra Nevada, where she contacted the Kogi tribe - an indigenous community of philosophers, doctors and teachers - and awarded them the Bios Prize. Furthermore, the Colombian Minister of the Environment, Juan Mayr Maldonado, was so impressed with B.I.O. that he is now an active member and an advocate of bio-diplomacy.

In Colombia, thanks to bio-diplomacy, there is interest by the government, the Indians and the mass media in recognising environmental problems and our capabilities to solve them. We must understand that bio-diplomacy is an important asset for governments in formulating decisions to protect nature.