

Dialogue 2.

Coexistence: Harmonious coexistence between humans and wildlife

Moderator: Adrian Steirn (Founder, Pegasus Agency)

Video Message: Braulio Ferreira de Souza Dias (Secretary General, Convention on Biological Diversity - CBD)

Panellists:

- Baek Gyu-Seok (Vice-Minister of Environment, Republic of Korea)
- Christopher Briggs (Secretary General, Ramsar Convention)
- Alan Weisman (Author)
- Suzanne Case (Chair, State of Hawaii, Dept. of Land and Natural Resources)
- Kelly Bricker (Professor and Chair, University of Utah, The International Ecotourism Society)

The moderator, **Mr Adrian Steirn**, started by asking the panellists: **does harmonious co-existence exist and, if not, what we can do about it?**

Mr Baek Gyu-Seok responded that in Korea, people and wildlife must live close so coexistence is important. More and more people seek outdoor recreation, increasing pressures on a limited number of outdoor places. The system of National Parks keeps broadening its offering in outdoor pursuits. Entrance fees were abolished and 100 million people per year visit these 80 parks. More people started to visit the mountains, with impacts such as over-used trails and the creation of illegal paths, so the numbers of trails was increased. The ministry developed ways to give people news of the natural environment. For example, there was a place famous for migratory birds in winter but not protected because of the opposition from the local people. Talks with the people were conducted and explanation given that for the birds, the site was a matter of existence, crucial to their survival. More consideration for nature needs to be fostered and articles to inform the public are being written to this effect. As such problems had to be resolved, today's talks about solutions to co-existence are welcome.

Mr Christopher Briggs explained that Ramsar works on one broad type of habitat: wetlands. Wetlands include lots of ecosystems: not just freshwater, but also coasts, coral reefs, etc... All our water comes from wetlands. If wetlands are not in good condition, it is hard for people to have a good life. But lots of wetlands have been lost, and now we need to preserve the ones we have left and restore them. This means co-existence. Wetlands purify our water, fix carbon (double the retention than forests). They also buffer the impacts of drought and flood; reduce the impacts of storms, hurricanes, etc. Wetlands also feed 3 billion people around the world - 20% of food is produced in wetlands (rice). They also are a big part of our leisure. We need to maintain and restore them; a more harmonious existence with wetlands is crucial as they are so important to us.

Ms Susanne Case expressed how great it was to be in Jeju, on an island people care very much about. Like Jeju, Hawaii is an island and will host the next IUCN World Conservation Congress, in 2016. Hawaii has many endemics species: 10'000, as well as many endangered and extinct species. Threats include: habitat destruction, Invasive Alien Species (IAS), climate change (CC). The rain forest is shrinking and coral reefs are stressed. As an island state, Hawaii can be seen as a microcosm of our planet. Interactions between human and wildlife can be well observed in a small place. In Hawaii, the environment has to be valued: all fresh water comes from the rainforest which can store it for up to 25 year before it goes into the aquifer. Some fish are highly threatened by overfishing, IAS and development. Fish provide food so need to be protected. The relation between people and environment need to be strengthen so people care

and protect it adequately. Inspiration can be drawn from the ancient Hawaiian culture which promotes caring for the environment and a harmonious relationship with nature; if you go into the forest, you need to ask permission to enter - respect is essential to straighten the sense of harmony. For example: dolphins swim along the coast and people like to go swim with them. But if you look at it from a dolphin's point of view, this is the time when they try to sleep, turning off half their brain; if disturbed, they go back at sea and don't get the rest they need. It is now forbidden to swim with dolphins; people need to understand this from a dolphin point of view. Once they understand, they respect. It is important to encourage people to look at things from the point of view of nature.

Mr Alan Weisman stated that now everything needs to be an environmental story because the environment underlies everything in life. During the expert meetings, a list of the threats to biodiversity was established. The list mentioned habitat destruction like land use change, overexploitation, IAS, CC, etc.; when he looked at the list, he realized it didn't speak about what is behind these words. Back then when these threats were first assessed as problems, there was half the number of people on the planet than there is now. Now the problem is that everybody on earth needs to eat and we take huge surfaces to produce food. Population graphs show that when we produce more food, we increase the number of people. The production of CO2 results in a similar graph. Production of energy is changing our atmosphere in a way that was unpredicted. We might be headed to a point soon when we will have seas several feet higher than now. We don't have the technologies to go to 0% CO2 emission but we have technologies to limit our population. Or we are going to manage this challenge gracefully, or nature is going to do it for us in a dramatic way.

Ms Kelly Bricker explained that the mission of The International Ecotourism Society is to unite communities' needs and conservation with ecotourism. Tourism depends on destinations and keeping these destinations attractive is important. The goal is to bring the conservation of biodiversity as a core of travel. We seek our nature experience in pristine areas, preferring to go to non-armoured coastlines, less built places, etc. There is a great economic bonus in providing close and intimate nature experiences to the travellers. It is important to engage travel providers in conservation to seek ways to minimize the impacts on the places they send tourists to, so they can keep getting their revenues from these places. The natural world should be a world they value and that they should wish to maintain healthy. Their contribution to conservation can be very valuable.

In a recorded video message, **Mr Braulio Ferreira de Souza Dias** thanked the Ministry of Environment, Jeju Special Self-governing Province and IUCN for hosting the event. He noted that conflicts between human and wildlife have become more frequent because of an increasing population, development, roads, and other encroachments on wildlife habitat resulting in more negative interactions. But we can build on existing successful approaches to address the problems. Humans and wildlife have lived in harmonious coexistence for a long time. We need intact, healthy and diverse ecosystems, and we need them connected. Towards that goal, we have international conservation targets that serve as a global framework to conserve biodiversity, like the Aichi targets. Mr Ferreira de Souza Dias encouraged leaders to make progress towards favouring co-existence.

Questions session

How would you define harmonious in the context of conservation?

Mr Christopher Briggs noted that there are different views. We need to use a resource in a way to keep as much of it as it is possible for the future. What is a wise use in one country might be different in another; we need to look at the regional context. We need to get the balance right because failure will result in bad consequences for us.

How do we work out of a vertical approach, but rather in a more horizontal, holistically way, in conservation?

Mr Alan Weisman responded that nature is a beautiful place and also a very dangerous place. We humans seem to be the only ones to understand the consequences of our actions. We have to think about our own self-interest but also about what all the other species need, because if they go, there is a good chance than us and our families might not get what we need either. So we need to understand that caring about other species is in our best interest: if we gobble too much, there will be nothing left for us.

Do you think human are invasive species?

Ms Kelly Bricker stated that humans are part of nature, part of ecosystems. And we need to be aware that our actions can cause harm. We are not separate; we are part of the ecosystems in which we live. We think of ourselves as dominant but this can be destructive. She concluded by saying that we have to recognize that we can have very negative impacts and take responsibility to minimize them, but she didn't see humans as invasive.

How does co-existence culturally work in Hawaii?

Ms Suzanne Case recognized that Hawaii doesn't have it all worked out: in some ways it is working well, in some others it still needs to be worked at. As an ecosystem degrades, there is a sense of harmony being lost; for example, when a forest is being evaluated, we say: very nice, pretty good, kind of junky, etc. - its state of degradation is reflected in the way we describe its appearance. Human can be invasive in the sense that they can be destructive. Something introduced can be ok, but when it takes over, it gets destructive. In Hawaii, we try to do our best in the important places but we recognize the challenges.

With so many people living in cities in South Korea, how do you educate people in the urban environment to care about the nature in the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone)?

Mr Baek Gyu-Seok explained that public education should rather be viewed as a communication approach. It is not a separate education; it is about how different ways of co-existence can be found and how we can communicate about them. He noted that about the issue of co-existence, it is really important to find ways to communicate in an effective manner. This should not be seen as a point just in term of education; the message needs to be communicated in a viable way: it should be an interactive communication journey.

Why should I care about wetlands? How does that person over there can care about wetlands if they have no access to them?

Mr Christopher Briggs emphasised the importance to make people understand why nature matters. He noted that when he tells people that all our water comes from wetlands, they realize their importance better. There seems to be plenty of water, but if people understand the water they drink and bath in comes from wetland, it is an important step. People need to realize

that when the water is dirtied, polluted, it is difficult and costly to clean. We need water. If we don't have wetlands, we don't have water, this is why it matters.

Mr Alan Weisman added that people say: we have oceans and there is desalination, so we can make fresh water. But there are lots of problems with desalination. A lot of energy is needed to desalinate: it is costly and a large amount of CO₂ is produced; plus there is the reject of salt brine. It is an expensive and dirty way of producing water.

People think technology can fix everything; but really?

Ms Kelly Bricker answered that we should see what it costs to try to reproduce nature. For example, look at the Biosphere II experiment: the cost to recreate air, water, etc. was absolutely huge. It is also very expensive to try to restore ecosystems - like dismantling dams, re-naturalize rivers, etc. And we have a difficult time doing it in an effective manner.

Mr Baek Gyu-Seok added that technology can solve a lot of environmental issues; however, not every issue can be solved by technology. No only we cannot count on solving everything with technology, but, even more important, we shouldn't bank it to the next generations.

Who speaks for nature? What is the right balance between a top down and a bottom up approach?

Ms Suzanne Case responded that balance can be hard to determine. But communities should be involved as they know what is best for them. If you look into things like: where do I get my energy, where does my food come from, it inspires you to protect what nurtures you. But overarching policies and rules that apply to everyone are also necessary; so we need both: bottom up and top down approaches, complementing each other.

How do you successfully manage population growth when the main religion prohibits family planning?

Mr Christopher Briggs noted that it is difficult to address this personal choice and religious question. It helps going towards a solution if people see the value of education. There are benefits not to have too many children, but it is a personal choice. It has to be acknowledged that it is difficult for our kids to have a life better than ours if we have more than 1 or 2 children.

In the Mozambique region, people say they are living harmoniously when they kill antelopes and impalas. They have done it for generation. How do you address this?

Ms Suzanne Case noted that there are cases when people are killing for survival, not for pleasure or leisure. She said she would question laws prohibiting them to feed themselves and there is a need to consider alternative strategies in such cases. For example, some native population in Alaska have hunting rights. There is a broad spectrum here. It is good to bring communities together with policy makers to try to understand the reasons and to discuss possible solutions.

Mr Alan Weisman gave another example in the US: Ducks Unlimited, a hunter organization. They buy lands to put in conservation; the habitat supports an abundance of ducks and people can hunt them. So as long as the wildlife is not killed to a point that it declines, we can say there is harmony.

In China, Vietnam: can we talk about any kind of harmony in regard to the ivory trade?

Mr Baek Gyu-Seok acknowledged that this was a difficult and delicate question. Korea has had environmental protection for a long time and the numbers of deer and boars increased, resulting in destructive impacts on agricultural crops. The farmers expressed concerns about the wildlife damaging their crops, so the ministry supported the farmers in buying equipment to protect their crops. That solution took into account the culture of the country. This shows that we can consider wildlife needs and find ways for co-existence. Now, in its mountains, Korea has been restoring a wild bear population; the challenge is to find a way to allow the bears to prosper, while allowing people to hike in the same regions.

Take away messages and actions

Mr Christopher Briggs said to first have a consciousness that water has value and use it with consideration. Turn faucets off, take short showers, etc. Then to understand the wetland next to you has value. If you value something, then you can get other people to value it as well. If we can start with ourselves, with our children, **we can be the ones who take care**, who pick the garbage; **we can inspire others, we are the change.**

Ms Suzanne Case noted first how she has a lot to learn from Korea. To live in harmony with nature, first we have to learn to live in harmony with each other, with respect; **develop respectful relations. This, with constructive dialogue, is a solution.** For example, she was once with a group who wanted to protect the local marine resources. One member was a fisher. He speared a fish just at the border of a protected area. His motivation was to provide food so he had the right. He actually caught an introduced fish which competes with local species. He opened the fish and showed it had swallowed another fish, a native one. This showed that there are different ways to learn about your environment: in labs or by experience. He had his way of gathering knowledge. **Learning from each other can help out global efforts.**

Mr Alan Weisman related his meeting with a group of journalists. Korea has a shrinking birth rate so why would family planning be relevant to its people. The answer is: because we live on the same planet. One thing we can do is help make sure the rest of the world can develop the means to control population growth. It would cost less to the US to support family planning per year than it is costing them per month in Iraq. Most money for family planning comes from the US, but this funding might dry due to the political context. There is also a need to provide universal female education across the world. **All can encourage their government to support family planning.**

Ms Kelly Bricker said that the way we travel nowadays is not that well and could be improved. The travel industry is booming. Tourism is place based. If we value the places to which people go, we can make good things happen. **We need to make sure that the travel industry brings benefits to the communities, supports nature or heritage sites and supports the local economy.** If people benefit from tourism, they will support it and preserve the places that attract the visitors. But there have been impacts. We are now better on track to understand sustainability. We hope that one day all tourism will help the planet; that it won't be needed to call it 'eco' anymore.

Mr Adrian Steirn concluded that we are here preaching to the choir. **Our challenge is to take what we learned here and spread it.** Human beings are reactionary, they get lots of warning. We have a responsibility to market conservation as a popular endeavour, like the NBA, etc... **We need to capture the imagination of the masses!**