

INTERVIEW TO JORGE RODRÍGUEZ QUIRÓS

He is currently Minister of the Environment, Energy and Telecommunications of Costa Rica (2009-2010). He was Vice-Minister, Ministry of Natural Resources, Energy and Mines (MIRENEM), 1986-1990; Vice-Minister of the Environment, Energy and Telecommunications, 2006-2009; President, Steering Board, National Fund for Forestry Financing (FONAFIFO). He was awarded "La Simiente" prize in 2000 for Natural Resource Development, the highest award granted annually by the School of Agricultural Engineers to its members.



1. Which are the most visible aspects and characteristics of climate change in your country? What are the prospects for the upcoming decades?

Based on the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Costa Rica is located in an area where climate change impacts are foreseen to be especially serious. In the last three years, several mass media in Costa Rica have reported that the dry season in the north of the country will be stronger. Little rainfall reduces grain harvesting and threatens livestock. The growing demand for water could bring about severe problems for agricultural production and human consumption. Meanwhile, in the Southern Caribbean, severe floods will happen more often. Deficient urban growth will affect more and more people every day with sewer and stream overflows. And, of course, climate change worsens epidemics, diseases and endangers over 160 thousand species in the country.

Vis-à-vis these events, a Second National Communication was prepared and published by the National Meteorology Institute, showing that if the water level in dams declines, the resource cost will increase. However, some of the dams are not being fully exploited and will be able to store more water when available. In turn, new dams should be created in the Caribbean springs where climate scenarios show greater rainfall. Another potential initiative is to foster cultural changes and promote efficient energy use. We must dare act and adapt something that is unavoidable.

2. Which are the most relevant concerns of climate change negotiations in your country? Who are the most relevant actors in this debate?

The relevant actors in this debate are the emerging economies, which undoubtedly include Brazil, India and Mexico. These are countries that have no liabilities but emit a lot. In this regard, as stated in Copenhagen already 15 years ago when we participated in the first Conference of the Parties (COP), our country highlighted the importance of environmental services provided to our planet by countries with tropical forests for fixing carbon and mitigating climate change.

Convinced of the above, we promoted aggressive policies for preserving forests and recovering forest cover with the hope that the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) would provide the necessary support to improve the contribution of developing countries (DGCs) to global mitigation efforts. But this did not happen.

We, however, represent a country that despite the fact that it has no binding obligations, has undertaken the most ambitious liability that any nation can have of becoming a neutral country in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, with the hope that other countries will likewise take on their responsibility to reduce emissions but also to provide resources so developing nations can face the social, environmental and economic challenges of climate change.

3. From the point of view of the interests in your country and of the Latin America and the Caribbean agenda, how do you evaluate the Copenhagen results?

Even when no global agreements were reached to reverse our planet's warming as expected, there was consensus on the need to protect forests and detain deforestation given its contribution to the planet's global warming. In Copenhagen the 192 member nations of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) accepted the need for an international regime to halt deforestation and protect forests, thus supporting the Costa Rican thesis. This should be considered a great success for the country after a struggle of years and many difficulties along the way.

On the other hand, a bilateral agreement was signed between the United States (US) and China which is important because the US shows unfulfilled obligations. China has no obligations but it is becoming the second most important emitter of GHG worldwide. I believe this exchange of ideas between both countries will bring about an important collateral reduction. Any activities they carry out will have an impact on total emissions.

4. Considering the Copenhagen results and conclusions, will it be necessary to review the national strategy in your country in relation with the international negotiations? In which areas and how? Do you see elements for the articulation of regional strategies?

Costa Rica has embraced the notion of environmental justice and has enshrined the right to a healthy and balanced environment in the Constitution. In order to guarantee this right, we have established the country's first tax on carbon in a DGC for the last 13 years so as to raise funds to financially support forest conservation and forest cover recovery policies that are providing our planet with an environmental service to mitigate climate change.

The Costa Rican strategy is thus clear. It is essential to obtain financial resources and consolidate the transfer of technology. Our main global commitment is to develop a low-carbon emission economy by 2021. In order to reach this goal, it is necessary to transfer technologies according to the mechanisms stated in the Framework Convention.

The problem is that any delay in the processes hinders timely availability of resources. These resources will allow us to have more and better technologies. At the regional level, Central American countries have not agreed much on the topic. They think the main aspect to consider is the capturing of resources through adaptation. We must understand that the threats of Climate Change may become opportunities in our country.

5. Are there chances for regional cooperation in the efforts for mitigation and adaptation? In which areas?

Of course, there is room for regional cooperation in the field of funding, transfer of technology and capacity building. We must invest to mitigate and adapt to climate change, particularly in DGCs that given their geographical position, their low income levels, their greater dependence on agriculture and their weak infrastructure suffer more as a result of drought, hurricanes and floods that have worsened in the last few years.

We must considerably increase international cooperation. Last year member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) allocated US\$120 billion to international aid for development, less than half the amount they are obliged to provide according to international agreements.

We must design several ways of transferring information and technology, ensuring that the successful experience of a little corner in our world becomes an imperative elsewhere. We must build an international platform against global warming which will allow us to quickly channel assistance, information and technology from one country to another.

We must forge creative and robust alliances between the public and private sectors which will allow us to turn environmental conservation into an asset and not an expense for our companies, something that Costa Rica has done successfully.

Using just a percentage of the US\$13 billion that will be allocated to military spending in the next 10 years, we could cover the whole of the costs for stabilizing GHG emissions worldwide. We are still in time to establish a sustainable and lasting peace with nature. Saving our planet is cheaper than annihilating it.



