

John SCOTT presentation to Sacred Sites side event organized by Yachay Wasi

The international community has recognized the close and traditional dependence of many indigenous and local communities on biological resources, notably in the preamble of the convention on biological diversity. There is also broad recognition of the contribution that traditional knowledge can make to both the conservation and the sustainable use of biological diversity - two fundamental objectives of the convention – and the need to ensure equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of traditional knowledge. For this reason, Parties to the convention undertook in Article 8j, to respect, preserve and maintain traditional knowledge relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, and to promote its wider application.

Most indigenous and local communities live in areas where the vast majority of the world's biological resources are found and also consider themselves proponents of Humanities' cultural diversity. Indigenous peoples have used biological diversity in sustainable ways for thousands of years and their cultures and knowledge are deeply rooted in the environment on which they depend. As a result of their close association with their territories, developments proposed to take place on their lands and waters have been a source of concern to them because of the long-term negative impacts on their livelihoods and traditional knowledge.

To address this concern as part of the work programme of Article 8j, Parties to the Convention decided to develop, in cooperation with indigenous and local communities, guidelines for the conduct of cultural, environmental and social impacts assessments regards such developments. On this basis of this recommendation by the Open Ended Working Group on Article 8j and related provisions, the 7<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties adopted the (pronounced Argwe-gu) Akwe:Kon Guidelines for the Conduct of Cultural, Environmental, and Social Impact Assessment regarding developments proposed to take place or which are likely to impact on sacred sites and on lands and waters traditionally occupied or used by indigenous and local communities. It is expected that impact assessments procedures and methodologies embodied in the Voluntary Guidelines will play a key role in providing information on the cultural, environmental and social impacts of proposed developments and thereby, help to prevent their adverse impacts on the lives of indigenous and local communities.

The framework of the CBD, with regard to TK is extremely relevant to indigenous peoples and their sacred sites. Indigenous peoples' historical experience with development had demonstrated that all too often indigenous peoples were victims of development rather than beneficiaries and often that imposed development was unsustainable. Article 8(j) of the CBD aims at addressing this particular concern and the Akwe:Kon Guidelines were developed, in cooperation with indigenous peoples, to implement Article 8 (j)'s provisions and to ensure that indigenous peoples would be able to participate in impact assessments on any projects that may affect them..

There remains a great deal of work concerning awareness-raising among indigenous and local communities and other interest holders, including governments and the international system, on the usefulness of the guidelines.

In particular, the general objective of the Akwe:Kon Voluntary Guidelines was to provide advice on the incorporation of cultural, environmental, including biodiversity related concerns and social considerations of indigenous and local communities into impact assessment procedures. The specific objectives of the guidelines included: support of the full and effective participation of indigenous and local communities in screening, scoping and development planning exercises; taking into account the cultural, environmental and social concerns and interests of indigenous and local communities; taking into account the traditional knowledge of indigenous and local communities, with due regard to the ownership of the need for its protection; promoting the use of technologies associated with TK; identifying and implementing appropriate measures to prevent or mitigate any negative impacts of proposed developments; and finally, taking into consideration of the interrelationships among cultural, environmental and social elements.

John went on to outline the procedures for impact assessments within the context of the Akwe:Kon Guidelines and noted the Guidelines provide a collaborative framework for ensuring the full involvement of indigenous and local communities in impact assessments. He also emphasized the strong link that has been established between sacred sites and protection of biological diversity. He further noted that in contextualizing the Guidelines, it is important to see the Guidelines as part of a package of international instruments aimed at preventing adverse impact of unsustainable development on sacred sites, and lands and waters traditional occupied and/or used by indigenous and local communities.

John brought also due attention to the Declaration on the Role of Sacred Natural Sites and Cultural Landscapes in the Conservation of Biological and Cultural Diversity, which was adopted by the Akwe:Kon Guidelines Workshop in Tokyo (June 2005) and noted its usefulness for work in this area.

**International Symposium “Conserving Cultural and Biological Diversity:  
The Role of Sacred Natural Sites and Cultural Landscapes”**

**Tokyo, Japan, 30 May to 2 June 2005**

Declaration on the Role of Sacred Natural Sites and Cultural Landscapes in the  
Conservation of Biological and Cultural Diversity

We, the participants of the international symposium on “Conserving Cultural and Biological Diversity: The Role of Sacred Natural Sites and Cultural Landscapes”, assembled at the United Nations University Centre in Tokyo (Japan) from 30 May to 2 June 2005:

*Expressing* our gratitude to United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations University (UNU), World Conservation Union (IUCN), the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) and United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) for providing a forum to discuss the links between nature and culture, and in particular extend our appreciation to UNU and its staff for hosting the symposium;

*Appreciating* that the Symposium has been organized in the context of *The 2005 World Exposition Aichi* and has benefited from the support of the Japanese Government and the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs and The Christensen Fund;

*Considering* that sacred natural sites and cultural landscapes are of vital importance for safeguarding cultural and biological diversity for present and future generations;

*Recognizing* that many sacred natural sites have great significance for the spiritual well being of indigenous peoples and local communities;

*Noting* the need to promote and safeguard cultural and biological diversity, particularly in the face of the homogenizing forces of globalization;

*Bearing in mind* that sacred natural sites, cultural landscapes and traditional agricultural systems cannot be understood, conserved and managed without taking into account the cultures that have shaped them and continue to shape them today;

*Noting* the unprecedented species extinction rate, pollution, climate change, the world water crisis and pressures on cultural diversity, which call for the development and adoption of ethical principles to sustain biological diversity and freshwater resources for present and future generations;

*Being convinced* that conservation of cultural and biological diversity together holds the key to ensuring resilience in both social and ecological systems;

Acknowledging the important role of indigenous peoples and local communities as custodians of sacred natural sites and as holders of traditional knowledge, which is fundamental for the preservation of biological and cultural diversity;

Further noting the importance of respecting indigenous peoples' rights to their lands and knowledge;

Acknowledging also the important role of spiritual traditions in the conservation of sacred natural sites and some cultural landscapes;

Taking into account the various international bodies, instruments, programmes, strategies and processes of relevance to the symposium's theme, and the importance of their effective implementation, in particular:

- the International Bill of Human Rights (1966);
- the 1971 Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance;
- the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention;
- International Labour Organization Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, 1989;
- the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development;
- the Convention on Biological Diversity (1992);
- the Seville Strategy for the World Network of Biosphere Reserves of the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme (1996);
- the mandate of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) (2000);
- the 2001 UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity;
- the 2003 UNESCO Intangible Heritage Convention;
- The IUCN International System of Protected Area Categories and the outcomes of the IUCN Vth World Parks Congress 2003;
- the FAO initiative on "Globally Important Ingenious Agricultural Heritage Systems";
- the UNU initiative on People, Land Management and Ecosystem Conservation;

Call upon national authorities, protected area and site managers, indigenous peoples and local communities, the international system, governments and non-governmental organizations, to consider and implement, where appropriate:

- The UNESCO/IUCN Guidelines for the Conservation and Management of Sacred Natural Sites;
- The CBD *Akwé:Kon Voluntary Guidelines for the Conduct of Cultural, Environmental and Social Impact Assessment Regarding Developments Proposed to Take Place on, or Which are Likely to Impact on, Sacred Sites and on Lands and Waters Traditionally Occupied or Used by Indigenous and Local*

*Communities;*

- The Yamato Declaration on Integrated Approaches for Safeguarding Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage;

Further call upon governments, protected area managers, the international system, governmental authorities and non-governmental organizations and others to respect, support and promote the role of indigenous peoples and local communities, as custodians of sacred natural sites and cultural landscapes, through the rights-based approach, in order to contribute to their well-being and to the preservation of cultural and biological diversity of such sites and landscapes;

Invite intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, the scientific community and the private sector, to enhance cooperation and to continue collaborative work for safeguarding the cultural and biological diversity embodied in sacred natural sites and cultural landscapes, and to better understand nature-culture interaction through comparative research;

Request UNESCO to establish, in order to ensure the holistic protection of sacred natural sites and cultural landscapes, a mechanism of cooperation between the 1972 and 2003 Conventions, envisaging mutually reinforcing safeguarding measures under international assistance provisions, as established in both conventions;

Also invite intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, international financial institutions and the private sector to continue cooperating with governments, local authorities, and indigenous peoples and local communities, with their free, prior and informed consent and their full and effective participation, for safeguarding cultural, linguistic and biological diversity, through the protection of sacred natural sites and cultural landscapes;

Urge the development of holistic approaches that take into account and respect different knowledge systems and integrate ethical, social, technical and economic dimensions, recognizing the historical dynamics of cultures and landscapes, while acknowledging the need of indigenous peoples and local communities for their sustainable livelihoods;

Call upon governments, international organisations, non-governmental organizations, religious institutions, indigenous and local communities to work together to ensure respect for religious and spiritual traditions and practices linked to sacred natural sites, and to protect such sites against desecration and destruction;

Recommend the integration of actions to promote the protection of sacred sites and cultural landscapes of indigenous peoples in the Programme of Action for the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People;

Further request the organizers of the Symposium, as well as all participating institutions and individuals, to make special efforts for the wide dissemination of this Declaration;

Also invite them to carry forward the outcomes of the Symposium through appropriate mechanisms, and to consider the development of a coordinated action strategy for the protection of sacred natural sites and cultural landscapes.

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