



**MISIÓN PERMANENTE DEL ESTADO PLURINACIONAL DE BOLIVIA
ANTE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS**

**Summary by the Permanent Mission of the Plurinational State of Bolivia of the Third High-Level Dialogue of the General Assembly on Harmony with Nature
(New York, Monday 22 April 2013)**

I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly held its third High-Level Dialogue on Harmony with Nature on 22 April 2013 at the United Nations Headquarters to commemorate International Mother Earth Day. The overall theme of the dialogue was “advance different economic approaches, in the context of sustainable development, to further a more ethical basis for the relationship between humanity and the Earth”.
2. Statements were delivered by the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Vuk Jeremic; the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon; the Minister of Economy and Finance of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Mr. Luis Arce; and, the Minister of Coordination and Heritage of Ecuador, Ms. María Belén Moncayo.
3. The scientific panel was composed of Mr. Ian Mason, Principal of the School of Economic Science (London); Mr. Fander Falconi, National Secretary of Development Planning of Ecuador; Mr. Jon Rosales, Associate Professor of Environmental Studies at St. Lawrence University (New York); and, Ms. Linda Sheehan, Executive Director, Earth Law Center (California). The panel was moderated by Mr. Andrew Revkin, Environmental Journalist at the New York Times and Senior Fellow at Pace University’s Pace Academy for Applied Environment Studies (New York).
4. Participants at the Dialogue included high-level representatives of Governments, representatives of international organizations and observers, representatives of major groups and civil society.
5. The meeting had before it the report of the Secretary-General on Harmony with Nature (A/67/214) as well as the General Assembly resolution (A/67/317) on Harmony with Nature, adopted on 21 December 2012.

II. Plenary Meeting

6. The President of the General Assembly opened the dialogue by expressing its gratitude to the Plurinational State of Bolivia for its role in bringing this issue to the General Assembly. He further congratulated the Secretary-General for his strong leadership in galvanizing global action on this issue. The President of the General Assembly stressed the implicit recognition that living harmoniously with nature requires fostering a balanced, ethical and non-exploitative

relationship with the Earth. He further emphasized the common duty that humankind has to maintain the Earth's health and integrity, as humankind very own existence is fully dependent on it. He highlighted that climate change, deforestation, pollution, desertification, the melting of ice caps, the degradation of land, and the exponential increase of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, are all consequences of the harm that humankind is doing to the environment. He also signalled the alarming rate at which humankind is consuming natural resources much faster than their replenishment.

7. The Secretary-General of the United Nations expressed the opportunity to reaffirm humankind's collective responsibility to promote harmony with nature and this commemorative day serves to remind us that the Earth sustains all life. He highlighted that climate change is a real and growing problem and unsustainable exploitation of natural resources, often driven by greed, is eroding the planet's fragile ecosystems. Biodiversity is increasingly being lost; more and more species are disappearing; short-sighted commercial practices are depleting fish stocks; and, acidity in the oceans is threatening the whole marine food chain. He acknowledged and welcomed the fact that millions of people around the world recognized this problem and are part of a growing movement calling for action to face the hard truth that the Earth is under threat. More and more Governments are hearing this call for action from their citizens. In this regard, the Plurinational State of Bolivia has adopted a legal framework that specifically protects Mother Earth. Ecuador's Constitution recognizes the rights of nature and, many other countries around the world are translating their respect for the environment into rights.

8. The Minister of Economy and Finance of the Plurinational State of Bolivia emphasized that the Earth and its ecosystems are our home and that in order to achieve a just balance among the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations, it is necessary to promote harmony with nature. He also stressed the importance that in order to live in harmony with nature, it was of paramount importance to acknowledge that the current unsustainable production patterns are at the center of the current economic system and thus deterring humankind to live in harmony with nature. Such patterns have only served to encourage humankind to live at nature's expense and not in harmony with it. He further stressed that even though the solutions are not easy and economic realities are diverse and complex, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, through such dialogues, would like to contribute and commit to build an economy that aspires to live in harmony with nature in which individual interests meet the interests of the collective well-being. An economy designed for all of us to fit and live in harmony with Mother Earth.

9. The Minister of Coordination of Heritage of Ecuador reiterated that if humankind truly wants to change its current course based on unsustainable production patterns at the expense of Mother Earth, it is of utmost importance that humankind re-orient itself and engages in drafting a Universal Declaration on the Rights of Nature for the benefit of everyone's Mother Earth. She further stressed the outcome of Rio+20 which calls for holistic and integrated approaches to sustainable development that will guide humanity to live in harmony with nature and lead to efforts to restore the health and integrity of the Earth system. For Ecuador, recognizing the rights of nature is a sine qua non condition to guarantee human rights and it is

in this spirit that they were written in the Constitution. In so doing, Ecuador recognizes Mother Earth rights to reproduce itself, respect its existence and regenerative capacity of its vital cycles, functions and evolutionary processes. The Minister also called for the establishment of a working group to draft the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Nature on the basis of existing texts and with the participation of the civil society and government representatives, among others.

III. Highlights of the Presentations made by the Panellists

10. Mr. Andrew Revkin, Moderator, then introduced the expert panel.

11. The first panellist, Mr. Ian Mason, suggested the adoption of justice as the ethical measure of economic success and stated that the real aim of economics is to establish justice and equity for the welfare of humanity and Earth, to make it possible for all to flourish. He noted that economics as currently understood produces many injustices, including great accumulations of wealth alongside great poverty, and a natural environment systematically destroyed to maintain profit margins. This calls for a thorough revision of contemporary understanding of economics. Justice could be introduced as a measure of economic progress in terms of the eradication of injustices. He further recommended the adoption of a duty of care for nature and each other as central to ethical economics, and that we implement that tenet through recognising and enforcing rights for Nature, just as we do human rights.

12. Dr. Falconí highlighted the need to grant Nature a role in the economic and social processes which would translate into two fundamental aspects. The first one would be to acknowledge the effects that thermodynamics have in the economic activity, effects that have been thoroughly studied by ecological economics. Scholars in this field believe that it is necessary to place bio-physical limits to the irrational aspects of economic growth and therefore, visualize an economic system that operates within thermodynamics logic. The key aspect in this approach resides in establishing limits to growth. Another key aspect is to take into account social and individual behavioural patterns, particularly those found in the South, given their very specific wealth, points of social fragility and rich cultural heritage. He referred to the Constitution of Ecuador as being the first one in the world in granting rights to Nature and to the National Plan for Well-Being, which contains more ambitious development objectives and goals than those currently contained in the sustainable development goals. The Plan already has a set of indicators, such as the ecological footprint, to monitor consumption levels across the population.

13. Dr. Jon Rosales then observed that the economy's proper relationship with nature is one of Nature as parent and economy as sub-system. He highlighted the role of science in identifying Nature's limits, stating that economic activity must remain safely within those limits. Dr. Rosales then described subsistence indigenous cultures that live in true harmony with Nature, respecting ecological thresholds and living under a "home economics" system embedded in the land. Sharing is particularly important to many subsistence cultures, which is the reason why such cultures are often called the "moral economy." These cultures long ago acknowledged the rights of Mother Nature, her nurturing abundance, her structural integrity, and her limits. Dr.

Rosales noted, however, that to a large degree the development agenda, not unlike its predecessor colonialism, has been to supplant such subsistence living. Dr. Rosales urged support for and promotion of the activities of those living sustainably. He described it as an approach “for the future, not the museums,” offering relief from trying to find a grand solution to sustainable development by focusing on what is already working.

14. The final panellist, Ms. Linda Sheehan, harkened back to the root of the word “economics” as managing or caring for our home. She described the harm being done by our false assumption of infinite growth in a finite world, and stated that the economy must serve the Earth, not the reverse. She highlighted the limitations of the terms “sustainable development” and “green economy” as solutions to the degradation of the Earth’s systems and the growing gap between rich and poor. She offered instead that we focus not on “development” and the “economy,” but on thriving “communities,” a term encompassing both humans and Nature, of which the economy is just one part. To achieve this goal, she recommended we embrace governance structures served by ecological economics, which cares for both human and environmental well-being. She added we also must recognize in our laws the inherent rights of Nature to exist and thrive, and implement these tools in every aspect of life. She recommended we follow the lead of nations and communities around the world who are already beginning to adopt ecological economics, rights of nature, and specific actions for the Earth into their laws, to ensure that our governance systems keep us on the path of living in Harmony with Nature.

15. Upon conclusion of the panellist’s presentations, the Moderator, Mr. Andrew Revkin, invited Member States, United Nations organizations, independent experts and other stakeholders present to offer their observations and questions on the materials presented. He also invited the audience watching the webcast to enter their input through Twitter at #hwn and submit their written remarks to the Secretariat. Member States offering statements and observations included Cuba, the European Union, Brazil, Uzbekistan, Benin, and Nicaragua, among others, as well as members of the civil society. Further information regarding the Dialogue including its webcast can be found at: www.harmonywithnatureun.org and www.youtube.com/harmonywithnatureun

IV. Recommendations

16. As stated in the Outcome Document of Rio+20, “The Future we Want”, the panellists and others offering statements at the Interactive Dialogue observed that:

a) Harmony with Nature implies an equitable and balanced relationship with the Earth, humanity’s source and sustenance. At the core of this relationship lies both a profound respect for the Earth and acknowledgement of her vital imperative to exist and thrive, as well as acceptance of humanity’s responsibility to restore the health and integrity of the Earth System. This resurrected recognition of human-Earth relationship reaffirms that human existence is inextricably part of Nature, and sets a path forward to acting on that affirmation. Accordingly, the Rio+20 Outcome Document, “The Future We Want,” noted that some countries already recognize the rights of nature in their laws.

b) The significant impact of human activities on the Earth System has been widely acknowledged by the United Nations, the international and scientific community, Major Groups and other stakeholders worldwide.

c) Many indigenous cultures have a rich history of understanding the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature, one that fosters a mutually beneficial relationship.

The expert panel put forth the following recommendations, echoed in part in the statements of Member States:

a) Reject the false assumption that infinite economic growth is possible in a finite world, and we must instead re-orient our economic system to serve people and planet, as is recommended by ecological economists.

b) Encourage universities and research establishments to review and revise contemporary understanding of economics, towards a goal of broad acceptance of a new economics that advances the well-being of all of humanity and Nature in accordance with an ethical standard of justice that encompasses both, humans and Nature.

c) Recognize the inherent rights of nature to exist and thrive, and the fundamental interconnections between humanity and Nature, by incorporating the inherent rights of Nature in enforceable statutes and constitutional provisions. These rights-based laws will guide our behaviour to respect these inherent rights, including through our duty care for Nature as we do for ourselves.

c) Support and promote, not denigrate and suppress indigenous cultures that are already living in harmony with the Earth and learn from them. Similarly, provide support for and promote the efforts of nations down to local communities who are working to reflect the rights of nature in their laws and governance systems and implement those laws for the benefit of humans and the natural world.

d) Advance now in policy-making the indicators and analysis of ecological economics, particularly economic measures of progress that better reflect humankind's impacts on the environment than Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and that promote just actions towards other humans and the natural world. Incorporate into such efforts the results of the United Nations Statistical Commission on alternative indicators to GDP when such results become available.

e) Showcase further, through the United Nations Harmony with Nature website at www.harmonywithnatureun.org, the work being undertaken, in keeping with paragraph 40 of "The Future We Want," to develop holistic and integrated approaches and actions that will guide humanity to live in Harmony with Nature and lead to efforts to restore the health and integrity of the Earth system.

f) Include in the provisional agenda of the 68th session of the General Assembly a sub-item entitled Harmony with Nature that draws on the Harmony with Nature approach and recommendations outlined herein as an input for the post-2015 development agenda.