



General Assembly

Disur.
GENERAL

A/44/394
14 July 1989
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH/SPANISH

Forty-fourth session
Item 86 of the preliminary list*

PROTECTION OF GLOBAL CLIMATE FOR PRESENT AND
FUTURE GENERATIONS OF MANKIND

Letter dated 14 July 1989 from the Permanent Representative
of Costa Rica to the United Nations addressed to the
Secretary-General

On specific instructions from the President of Costa Rica, Dr. Oscar Arias Sánchez, I have the honour to transmit herewith a copy of the letter addressed by him on 10 July 1989 to the President of the United States, Mr. George Bush, and to the other Heads of State or Government of the seven major industrialized countries who are meeting today in Paris, concerning the environmental issues facing the world at the present time (see annex).

I should be grateful if the text of this letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly under item 86 of the preliminary list.

(Signed) Carlos José GUTIERREZ
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

* A/44/50/Rev.1.

ANNEX

Letter dated 10 July 1989 from the President of Costa Rica to
the President of the United States of America

On behalf of the people and the Government of Costa Rica, permit me this opportunity to congratulate you for the vision and determination to make global environmental issues a priority on your agenda at this critical moment in human history.

Two year ago, the leaders of the Group of seven nations offered invaluable support to the Central American peace initiative. Today, I ask you to devote your attention to another set of urgent problems, this time common to all developing nations: the threat of tropical deforestation and the need to redirect the development of strategies of developing nations toward a sustainable course. The destruction of tropical forests, home to nearly two thirds of all existing animals and plant species, is proceeding at an unprecedented rate. Today species are being extinguished thousands of times faster than in any previous evolutionary period. Today, however, we are also presented with an unique opportunity to reverse this trend. Appropriate economic incentives to tropical developing countries could support a massive biomass buildup on a global scale. Such an increase in biomass is increasingly recognized as the most effective way to curtail the potential impact of global climatic change.

Costa Rica, along with the vast majority of developing countries, will experience the disappearance of our remaining unprotected forests before the end of the century unless effective actions are taken to protect those resources. Economic pressures are forcing our rural populations onto a path of destructive short-term exploitation of biomass resources, such as forests, wetlands and grasslands. Such exploitation is expanding ecological destruction, increasing pressures for climatic change and limiting the development options of future generations. In most cases, however, there is still hope. It is possible to reverse this trend and impede destruction by an active fostering of biomass buildup which will create new development opportunities.

The growing of plants on an unprecedented world-wide scale is the most effective action that can be undertaken to reduce impact on global climatic change and to preserve biological diversity. Because of the biological diversity harboured in many developing nations, we have a crucial role to play in this strategy. Such a strategy would encourage stewardship of land and water resources and promote the re-greening of the planet.

During my term of office, Costa Rica has embarked - with considerable economic and social sacrifice - on a number of important initiatives to protect our unique natural environment. We are encouraging reforestation by means of innovative mechanisms, such as debt for nature swaps, and we are promoting integrated management of protected areas with special consideration of the needs of the human populations inside these areas.

With grants from the Governments of the Netherlands and Sweden, as well as the co-operation of many private organizations, Costa Rica has purchased to date nearly 5 per cent of its commercial debt and converted it to local currency. Converted debt is then used to fund maintenance and buildup of our biomass resources, through integrated management of protected areas and reforestation projects carried out in conjunction with peasant organizations. This incentive system has proved an effective and imaginative way to address forest destruction.

These experiences have taught us that the destructive cycle in which most developing countries are trapped can be broken. By reducing economic pressures and creating appropriate incentives, developing countries can embark on a path of sustainable development without imposing undue hardship on the poorest sectors of the population. However, as long as terms of trade for the developing world keep deteriorating and developing nations continue to be net exporters of capital, the majority of people in the developing world will be forced to continue spiralling downward into misery and poverty. One example of unfair and unproductive terms of trade are the agricultural subsidies within the industrialized nations. At a combined total of over \$100 billion per year, these subsidies reduce opportunities for farmers in developing countries, thus discouraging the very people whose support is needed to implement environmentally sound agricultural policies at the grass-roots levels.

Actions to mitigate global environmental problems cannot wait for the advent of a new international economic order. The efforts being made by developing countries would be more effective if unequal exchange were reduced, protectionism decreased and debt renegotiated. Ultimately, new resources are required to deploy workable global strategies as outlined above. As concrete steps to initiate this process, several mechanisms should be established in the short term:

(a) Debt for nature swaps should be encouraged by both developed countries and multilateral development banks. These swaps should be expanded from commercial to bilateral obligations, so that old loans requiring foreign exchange could be earmarked in local currency for environmentally sound projects;

(b) An environmental rehabilitation and development fund should be created by the industrialized nations. Responsible directly and indirectly for considerable ecological destruction, they have the resources needed to help the developing world implement strategies for sustainable development. Such a fund would enable us to address environmental issues in a mutual, respectful and constructive manner.

(c) Policies dealing with agricultural subsidies should be reconsidered, in the light of the negative impact that they have on developing country farmers and consequently on the global environment;

(d) Efforts to negotiate urgent global treaties that recognize as common resources our shared elements - such as the atmosphere, the oceans, and biodiversity - should be encouraged and expedited.

Once again, I wish to express my gratitude for the support that you have provided to our peace efforts and for the courage that you display in tackling this new set of challenges. Let us work together to usher in a new era of responsible and creative co-operation among nations, seeking a world of peace among people and with the earth.
