

**Mr. Adalberto Cortesi
V. Chairman TAMSA
Campos Eliseos 400
Mexico City 11580
Tel.: (52-5) 282 99 22
Fax.: (52-5) 280 78 22
e-mail: cortesi@tamsa.com.mx**

**Paper presented by Mr. Adalberto Cortesi of Mexico City at the
2001 Annual Conference of The World Future Society in
Minneapolis, Minnesota.**

=====

**“The new environmental management in Mexico:
a hope for the future”.**

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am happy to be here at this meeting organized by the World Future Society. First of all, let me introduce myself: I am V.Chairman of TAMSA, a seamless steel pipe factory. I am as well a member of the Board of Pronatura, a Mexican NGO. As proud as I am to represent Mexico at this meeting, let me nevertheless point out that I am an Italian citizen.

A new millennium has just begun and humanity should be VERY concerned by pollution of soil, water and air, desertification and disappearance of ecosystems and species, deforestation, hunger and misery, all of which reveal an environmental crisis.

Mexico, a country with an enormous biodiversity and a great cultural wealth, is, unfortunately, part of this crisis.

Twenty years ago, a group of Mexican professionals and businessmen decided that a passive worrying attitude towards the continuous environmental degradation was not enough - it was time to act.

So they joined talents and created Pronatura, a private Association in Mexico. The organization is formed by many different people who share one common goal: to preserve the flora, fauna and priority ecosystems, and promote a type of society that respects nature.

These founders defined the essence of our organization, keeping it away from political, lucrative or any other kind of interest which could represent a conflict, the decisions of Pronatura obeying only and exclusively the will of its associates.

During the last 20 years, Pronatura has pioneered several aspects of the conservation work in Mexico, and has been successful in many ways. These successes have been possible due to the serious work done by the organization which has won the trust and support of many Foundations, Government Agencies and Institutions, both Mexican and foreign, but mainly from the U.S.A. It is fair to acknowledge that the credit for this support has been given not only to Pronatura, but to its real and tangible effect of building a healthier world for future generations.

Our organization began working with the "conservation in captivity of species in danger of extinction" like the "pavón", a horned which has become our emblem; we have also participated in the research of several other species of wildlife.

In 1987, Pronatura became the first organization to establish a private reserve in Mexico. This reserve was dedicated exclusively to conservation, something unprecedented and unheard of in our country until this date. And, following this line of conservation work, we have fought for, and been successful in, having the various national legislatures recognize the right of an individual to decide on the future use of his/her properties which can be destined for the noble task of conservation.

We are proud to say that Pronatura, supported by other institutions belonging to both the government and private sectors, has initiated the difficult task of creating artificial reefs by the sinking of old ships. To this day, there is no other Mexican Environmental Organization that has been successful in a project of such nature.

On the other hand, the complex mosaic of environments, forms of property and cultural groups existing in our country, and the real impossibility of working in every part of the nation, has forced Pronatura to identify "priority areas of conservation", that is,

areas where action is urgently needed in order to preserve the Mexican biodiversity. Thanks to this approach, and to the joint work done with government representatives, Pronatura has managed to achieve the best results from its actions.

The Pronatura model has been replicated in several Mexican states, and today there is a network formed by 7 chapters, strategically distributed around the country, working together as one organized entity at a national level.

In 1996 our work in conservation was recognized by the Mexican Government. Pronatura was distinguished with the Prize of Ecological Merit, the highest Mexican award of this type. This prize has made us proud to continue with our conservation actions striving for the best quality possible. In 1999, we also received, from The Nature Conservancy, the Clifford F. Messinger prize, because Pronatura was considered the Conservation Organization with the most achievements in Latinamerica.

Nevertheless, in spite of our accomplishments, a HUGE task still lies in front of us.

In any environmental field, more than the political will of the authorities, what Mexico needs is the serious help of more people and organizations dedicated to conservation. According to official information, 93% of our country's rivers and lakes, - both natural and man-made - are polluted; 64% of agricultural and forest land is degraded. In the 20th century, Mexico lost more than 95% of its rainforests, more than half of its temperate forests and a still unidentified percentage of its arid zones. Each year 700 million tons of fertile soil are lost. All of this means that almost 80% of the national territory is eroded, and about 1.5 million acres of forests are lost every year.

The species living in such ecosystems also find themselves in a fragile position. In face of this situation, Mexican environmental authorities have declared that 2,421 species face some sort of threat, and of these, 336 are in danger of extinction.

Mexico lives in a paradox which is not exclusive to us, rather, it is probably the rule among the countries called "mega-diverse"

which have, on one hand, extraordinary biological wealth, and on the other, extreme poverty. Only the United States escapes partially from this fact.

This co-relation between biodiversity and the degree of poverty in Mexico can be expressed by the fact that those regions identified as "priority areas" are inhabited by 3.3 million Mexicans living in radically deprived conditions, lacking all services and with a low degree of formal education, something which, sadly, is the same as writing the death sentence for many species of flora and fauna found in these areas.

Natural disasters, on the other hand, also cause severe environmental damage to the country: from 1993 to 1997, the losses caused by forest fires, droughts and flooding represented 10.6 % of the Gross National Product (GNP) of the country.

The background to these environmental problems has stopped belonging to the sphere of the individual; today, together with the human-nature relationship, a large part of the environmental

problems answer to questions that transcend political borders between countries; they belong, instead, to a global scale.

There are 6 billion people in the world, and we estimate that by the year 2050 there will be more than 8,9 billion. More than 95% of this population growth will take place in developing countries. All of this means that the world population is growing more rapidly in poor countries, countries which are less prepared to satisfy the basic needs and create opportunities for its peoples.

I must admit that I am somehow obsessed with the problem of world population growth. This is why I will take one more minute to emphasize figures that each and everyone of us should know by heart:

It took all human history to reach a world population of ONE billion in 1804.

It took 123 years to reach TWO billion in 1927.

It took 33years to reach THREE billion in 1960.

It took 14 years to reach FOUR billion in 1974.

It took 13 years to reach FIVE billion in 1987 and

according to U.N. demographers there will be SIX billion on our planet by early October of this year. Is it not about time we ALL start doing something? And I mean ALL OF US: at every possible level, no matter what our political and religious leanings may be.

The countries with a mega-diversity are precisely those that are facing this demographic growth. The most affected populations and countries are in Africa and Southern Asia. The damage that the wild species will suffer in these mega-diverse countries with the increase in population and poverty is unknown. Nevertheless, in any of the possible scenarios, the results are the same: the eventual and irreversible disappearance of species of wild plants and animals.

This demographic growth is also reflected in an increase of inequality, as each child born in the industrialized world consumes and pollutes, throughout his or her lifetime, the same as 30 to 50 children born in developing countries. This means that it is precisely the industrialized countries that should be held greatly responsible for the demand in services and products

which originate mainly in the poorest countries. Is it fair that the developing countries become mute witnesses of the bonanza of the developed countries?

In Pronatura we think that this world trend should be reversed in order to allow the self-sufficiency of nations and the acquisition of a higher degree of well being. As a result, the pressure of poverty on natural resources would diminish.

Pronatura also worries about the worldwide extermination of species. If the trend of extermination of wildlife species continues at the same rate as today, by the year 2050 we will have half the species we now have. How will humanity be affected by this massive extinction? Will developed countries continue to enjoy their high standards of living or will this extinction become just one more of the many facets characteristic of the misery of the developing countries? Will we, as humans, assume that it is such a terrible problem that there is nothing left to do?

Our civilization also produces atmospheric pollutants which have global repercussions, that translate in a gradual atmospheric warming. Atmospheric concentrations of CO₂ have increased 30% since the 18th century and it is estimated that they will increase by 250% during this new century. Also important are the emissions of Methane and of Nitrogen Oxides, gases which also contribute to the atmospheric warming.

Future projections of global warming indicate that the temperature of the planet will increase by 8°C, with severe consequences such as an increase of almost 3 feet in the sea level and, as a result of which the coasts and beaches will be modified, the coastal cities will flood and there will be droughts and hurricanes. This warming will also cause many species to disappear, species that will not be able to adapt to this severe change in their living conditions. It is urgent that world governments do their best efforts to find mechanisms of international cooperation which will help stop these climatic modifications.

With this sad perspective for the future, the organized groups which are emerging from society have raised their voices, some in protest, others with proposals. Pronatura belongs to the second group. We consider that the model we have developed is an adequate option for the implementation of conservation tasks which this world demands.

Rachel Carson, in the 60's, raised the alarm in the minds of Americans with her book "Silent Spring". The pages of this book urged the readers to take immediate action in face of a future which seemed threatened by technological advances. Today, 40 years later, we see that time is running out for the individuals, organized groups, countries and the international community.

Pronatura considers that the same principles and style of work adopted by our organization could be replicated at the Government level, which would mean working with others, searching for agreements instead of imposing opinions, basing the decisions on scientific information, aiming at sustainable development, but, above anything else, being sensitive to nature.

These have to be the strategies which could eventually mitigate and reverse the adverse environmental tendencies.

Before I conclude, let me give a few more figures which – I am sure – will shock you:

- **On our planet, 1.2 billion people live in extreme poverty. Over 1 billion has no access to drinking water and suffers of food shortage. About 3 million people every year die for drinking polluted water.**
- **From 1999 to the year 2000 (12 months !) the world population has increased in 77 millions: this equals to adding a city like Philadelphia every week !**
- **In the year 2000, over 532 million cars have hit the roads of our planet. If we place them one behind the other, we would cover the Equator more than 55 times.**
- **If consumers don't ask for a change, world industry will keep producing products which pollute. But we all know that if the consumer demands, it IS possible to switch to a production much more responsible socially. Therefore we may say that at the very end, it is the consumer the one that saves or destroys our planet.**

We have advanced in the knowledge of the environment, and have therefore seen an alarm sign that should not be ignored. It is time we act. Our environmental surroundings cannot wait for long term actions to take place. Time is running out. If we do not act now we run the risk of arriving at a point of no return.

The degree of damage to the resources, both on a national and international scale, can no longer be resolved by the good will of a few. We need to incorporate as many people as possible to our struggle for a better future. Businessmen, students, academics, farmers, workers, people in government, merchants, boys and girls, all of us have much to gain from this proposal.

We are beginning to build our environmental future today.

My last words will not be spoken: you will have to read them in one last picture taken by me about 40 years ago, at the Anthropological Museum of Honolulu.

No comments and thank you very much.

Note: the picture shows a tombstone which says:

**IN MEMORY OF
MAN
2.000.000 B.C. - 2030 A.D.
HE WHO ONCE DOMINATED
THE EARTH ---
DISTROYED IT
WITH HIS WASTES
HIS POISONS, AND
HIS OWN NUMBERS**