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JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Contribution of the United Nations system to the conservation and
management of Latin American cultural and natural heritageComments of the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to submit to the General Assembly his comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Contribution of the United Nations system to the conservation and management of Latin American cultural and natural heritage" (A/37/509).

A. Introduction

1. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) entitled "Contribution of the United Nations system to the conservation and management of Latin American cultural and natural heritage" has been prepared following a number of normative instruments, resolutions, conventions and other international pronouncements and programmes which have conferred on the United Nations system a mandate to be actively involved in the conservation and management of the world's natural and cultural heritage. This has been brought out most forcefully in the Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the United Nations Conference on Human Environment, ^{1/} held at Stockholm in 1972, and with the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Other instances are the World Heritage Convention ^{2/} and the Man and Biosphere Programme (MAB) ^{3/} of UNESCO and, more recently, the World Conservation Strategy. ^{4/}

* A/38/50.

2. The latest reaffirmation of the need to achieve an ecologically sustainable development process has been embodied in the International Development Strategy for the Third United Nations Development Decade, 5/ and in General Assembly resolution 35/74 of 5 December 1980 on international co-operation in the field of the environment, in which the Assembly welcomed the launching of the World Conservation Strategy and urged all Governments and international organizations, organs and bodies of the United Nations system to take it into account in developing their policies and programmes. At its thirty-fifth and thirty-sixth sessions, the General Assembly also adopted resolutions on the protection of cultural and natural heritage (resolutions 35/7 of 30 October 1980 and 36/6 of 27 October 1981).

3. The report provides the first review of activities connected with the World Conservation Strategy in Latin America and already contributed to the review of the major achievements in the implementation of the Stockholm Plan of Action during the 1982 UNEP's Governing Council Session of a Special Character.

4. The Secretary-General welcomes the report, which will be useful for follow-up activities to the World Conservation Strategy. The document is particularly relevant at a time when the General Assembly has adopted the World Charter for Nature whose main thrust links up directly to the World Conservation Strategy. It includes a number of very pertinent observations which will contribute to further improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the United Nations system in Latin America and the Caribbean in the specific areas it reviews.

5. The Secretary-General concurs with the views of the Inspectors regarding the need for more support to certain international conventions as well as for the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) (para. 25). He has also noted that the UNEP has a strong record in encouraging countries to adhere to conventions both directly and through support to organizations such as IUCN and CITES secretariat.

B. General comments

6. The Secretary-General agrees with the Inspectors' observations on channels of communication between organizations and institutions responsible for heritage and the United Nations system (para. 30) and believes that the present trend of increased designation by Latin American countries of focal points to deal with environmental matters should contribute to correct some of the deficiencies in communications. A number of the organizations of the United Nations system as well as the Organization of American States (OAS) and development banks (IBRD/IDB) have also designated units and/or officials as focal points on environmental matters.

7. In what concerns the role played by non-governmental organizations (para. 31), the Secretary-General is aware of the close contacts maintained by UNEP and Resident Representatives of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with non-governmental organizations.

8. The comments in the report on the subject of training and research institutions are very pertinent. The Secretary-General is pleased to confirm that

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the UNDP/UNESCO project, entitled "Regional Andean Project for the Conservation, Restoration and Re-evaluation of Cultural Heritage" (RLA/79/005) has been extended by two additional years in order to contribute to the development of the mechanisms recommended in paragraph 36 of the report. Furthermore, the establishment of the network of training institutions on environmental sciences, which is being promoted by UNEP through a co-ordination unit in its Regional Office, will ensure better utilization of the resources available.

9. The Secretary-General wishes to emphasize the progress made in attempting to catalogue national parks and equivalent protected areas of Latin America and the Caribbean, specially during the June 1981 meeting, convened by IUCN and co-sponsored by UNEP, and attended by the Directors of the National Park System from all countries in the region (para. 52). In this respect, it may be of interest to note that UNEP and IUCN have also played an important catalytic role in planning and establishing systems of protected areas with the aim of ensuring that each area is managed effectively. A review of the planning and management of national parks and protected areas is being continued by UNEP/IUCN for the Neotropical Realm, and a large number of new and revised inventory sheets have been prepared for the UNEP/IUCN World Directory of National Parks and Protected Areas and are included in the publication "Conserving the Natural Heritage of Latin America and the Caribbean: the Planning and Management of Protected Areas in the Neotropical Realm", published in 1981 under a UNEP/IUCN project. The United Nations List of National Parks and Equivalent Reserves is another contribution by UNEP/IUCN toward catalyzing conservation efforts globally and regionally. Also, UNEP has provided direct financial support to CITES and to the promotion of the CITES membership, which now comprises 77 Contracting Parties, including 17 in Latin America, as well as intellectual input. It has provided CITES an international framework which has enabled its secretariat to develop more quickly. Within the framework of UNEP/IUCN co-operation, species conservation efforts have been catalyzed globally as well as regionally through continued compilation and computerization by the Conservation Monitoring Centre (CMC) at Cambridge of up-to-date information on most of the species of threatened mammals, and many of the birds, reptiles, and amphibians and plants, based on the best available scientific sources. Finally, UNEP has contributed "know-how" by producing jointly with UNESCO/MAB reports on the "state of knowledge" in the areas of: (a) tropical forest ecosystems; (b) tropical grazing land ecosystems; and (c) regional documents on Andean ecosystems.

10. The World National Parks Congress, convened by IUCN and co-sponsored by UNEP with the support of FAO, UNESCO and WWF in Bali, from 11 to 22 October 1982, was the third world meeting of national park officials and others engaged in protecting this precious natural heritage. The meeting has reviewed progress achieved during the last decade and has set goals for the future. At present over 400 million hectares of world land and water areas have been placed in protected status by people and Governments in 120 nations. UNEP supported the attendance at the Bali Congress of 45 experts from different regions, including Latin America (at the total cost of more than \$US 70,000).

11. Other achievements under joint UNEP/IUCN projects include the preparation of a biogeographic map with an overlay of protected areas included in the United Nations list of national parks and equivalent reserves.

12. Concerning the United Nations system co-operation (para. 55), JIU correctly points out UNEP's catalytic role in the region. The Secretary-General is also aware that UNEP has played a role in drawing together the views of the Governments in Latin America on the steps towards the preparation of the World Conservation Strategy and in gathering information on wild life resources within six projects with IUCN (FP/1103-75-04, FP/1110-79-01, FP/1110-80-01, FP/1110-80-02, FP/1110-80-03 and FP/0502-80-01) at a total cost to UNEP of \$US 4.6 million; Horizontal Co-operation in Latin America relating to Styles of Development and Environment (FP/0404-80-02), with ECLA (\$US 350,000); Andean Project: Integrated Research and Training and Information Programme: Human Settlements, Tourism and Conservation (FP/1105-75-02), with UNESCO (\$US 150,000); Ecological Principles for Development in the American Humid Tropics (FP/0202-73-02), with IUCN (\$US 12,000); Regional Meeting on Integrated Ecological Research and Training Activities in Latin America with Special Reference to Tropical Forest Ecosystems (FP/0202-73-03), with UNESCO (\$US 35,000); a Survey of Tropical Forest Conservation in Venezuela (FP/0206-74-06), with Sierra Club (\$US 45,000); Environmental Implications of Salto-Grande Multi-purpose Hydraulic Development Scheme (FP/1000-78-02), with CTM (\$US 256,000); Support to the International Centre for Environmental Sciences Education and Training for Spanish-speaking Countries (FP/0301-77-04), with Government of Spain (\$US 1,650,000); etc.

13. The Secretary-General has noted the Inspectors' comment that information about technical co-operation activities specifically concerned with conservation and management of the heritage is rather fragmentary and hard to obtain. The Secretary-General is confident that the co-operative effort launched by the UNEP's Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (ROLA) in June 1980, which encompasses all regional information systems (REPIDISCA, LATINAH, ECLA, CLADES, INFOTERRA), with the objective of promoting an integrated system of information on environmental matters, will help redress the situation. Furthermore, he notes with satisfaction that an inter-agency working group, supported by consultants, is now establishing this integrated system.

14. The Secretary-General has examined with particular interest the observation that the decisive development planning and policy-making levels have not reached the point of generally accepting the relationship between sustainable development and conservation (para. 67). ~~The validity of this comment seems to have been confirmed by the fact that the issue of the continuation of the UNDP-financed project RLA/72/028 (referred to in para. 61 of the JIU report) was not brought up by the Governments in the region during the very ample process of consultation that took place in connection with the preparation of the UNDP Regional Programme for Technical Co-operation for 1982-1986.~~

15. The Secretary-General believes that comments about the disappointment of Government officials and private individuals concerned with heritage matters on what they perceived as lack of drive and leadership in the conservation of cultural and natural heritage from the organizations of the United Nations system mainly

concerned (para. 108), should be read in the context of other sections of the report which refer to considerable work carried out under the aegis of the United Nations system. In the case of UNDP, Resident Representatives have constantly reminded Governments about the international mandates in this field when discussing allocation of Indicative Planning Figures. As for UNEP, that Agency was requested to function in a catalytic and co-ordinating role in the field of environment which implies a condition of non-executing agency with the consequent lack of visibility at certain national and local levels. The Secretary-General agrees that the concerns expressed in paragraph 104 regarding the need to promote conservation and to encourage and support local efforts should be fully borne in mind by Resident Co-ordinators in the exercise of their functions relating to the operational activities for development of the United Nations system.

16. The Secretary-General believes that the review of work conducted in these fields by regional intergovernmental organizations, bilateral aid agencies and non-governmental organizations is thoughtful and extensive (A/37/509, paras. 105-113). He has noted with satisfaction that both UNEP and UNDP have established strong working relationships with both the Organization of American States and the Inter-American Development Bank, which should contribute to appropriate co-ordination.

17. The Secretary-General shares the JIU's concern about the need for improved co-ordination between the many organizations operating in the region in conservation and management of heritage (para. 118). He is confident that the present mechanism of inter-agency consultative meetings under UNEP/ROLA's aegis will receive increasing support and will thus generate appropriate action to respond to the needs underlined in the report. The Meeting on Conservation, which took place in December 1982, contributed to appropriate co-ordination with ecosystems conservation groups, improved links between global and regional strategies, and this should assist in avoiding delays. This initiative should also favourably respond to the JIU's observation about the desirability of co-ordination mechanisms at the regional level (para. 123).

18. The Secretary-General concurs with the need for a mechanism or form which enables Governments of the region to meet to discuss issues connected with conservation and proper management of cultural and natural heritage. The Secretary-General believes that the mechanism launched in March 1982 through the Intergovernmental Regional Meeting on Environment in Latin America and the Caribbean, which took place in Mexico City, was a basic step forward to assign high-level priority to a harmonized and co-ordinated policy on environmental matters. A further meeting of Government experts will take place in March 1983 to discuss regional activities that merit support.

19. The Secretary-General shares the observation in the JIU report concerned with the need for the United Nations system to be fully attuned to the exigencies of a conservation-oriented approach to development in the region (para. 135). He is confident that the World Conservation Strategy, endorsed by the General Assembly in 1979, will continue to stimulate renewed political commitments which, in some instances, have already been followed up by a series of activities in various

countries aimed at implementing the Strategy. These activities include: preparation of national conservation strategies, attempts to influence aid programmes, national policy and legislation, and education and training programmes, e.g. in Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Honduras and Venezuela. The Secretary-General will continue to make efforts to ensure that the United Nations system responds to this recent increased demand by Governments.

20. The Secretary-General believes that the responsibilities of the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) on the subject (paras. 137 and 138) have to be developed taking into account the decisions 10/2 6/ and 10/3 7/ of the tenth session of UNEP's Governing Council, held at Nairobi in May and June 1982.

C. Comments on specific recommendations

21. The specific comments of the Secretary-General, which follow, should be read in the context of the above considerations which have guided his response to the recommendations of JIU.

Recommendation 1. The Secretary-General believes that this recommendation should be reviewed in the light of the latest decisions of the Governing Council of UNEP referred to above.

Recommendation 2. This recommendation is to be considered in the contexts of the present achievements of UNEP's regional office for Latin America and the results of UNEP's projects for strengthening environmental capabilities for the regional commissions as it relates to ECLA. The Governing Council of UNEP, at its tenth session, considered revised terms of reference of the regional offices of UNEP and the environmental co-ordination units in ECA, ESCAP, ECLA and ECWA which the Council found to be appropriate and will help minimize overlap. The action by the Governing Council of UNEP will contribute to realizing the objective of recommendation 2 for co-ordinated effort for conservation and environmental activities by UNEP and ECLA for the whole region.

Recommendation 3. The Secretary-General believes that this recommendation has also to be reviewed in the light of the present co-ordinating role of ROLA for UNEP activities in Latin America.

Recommendation 4. The Secretary-General concurs with the idea of possible increase in resources devoted to conservation by agencies in the United Nations system. Nevertheless, this should be done taking also into consideration other high priority areas identified by the international community as well as the very limited resources now available for technical co-operation.

In regard to the need for countries to adhere to international conservation conventions and to streamline national institutional arrangements, the Secretary-General agrees that additional efforts are justified.

Recommendation 5. The Secretary-General concurs with the need for more intercountry co-operation within the framework of technical co-operation among developing countries, including integrated training for the management of wildlife and protected areas. Regarding regional projects supported by the report, the Secretary-General refers to his comments in paragraphs 8 and 12 above.

Recommendation 6. The Secretary-General endorses the finding that the Latin American region has attained a high degree of self-reliance in expertise concerning conservation and management of heritage. The Secretary-General believes that Governments should continue to increase linkages for technical co-operation among developing countries and make efforts to ensure that already available capacity is fully utilized.

Recommendation 7. The Secretary-General agrees that there is a need to find ways to strengthen regional co-operation in preparing educational and promotional materials. He also concurs, as in the case of recommendation 6, on the need to foster and strengthen links and arrangements for technical co-operation among developing countries within the region and with other regions.

Recommendation 8. The Secretary-General agrees about the need for a collaborative effort for the exchange of information and action concerning educational programmes and consciousness-raising campaigns.

The Secretary-General believes that co-operation with other intergovernmental organizations such as OAS in this particular field will be facilitated by joint declarations - already signed - which call for the international institutions to take environmental considerations into account in all development plans they assist or finance.

Notes

1/ Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm, 5-16 June 1972, (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.73.II.A.14 and corrigendum), chapter II.

2/ Adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 1972 and came into force at the end of 1972.

3/ Adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 1970.

4/ Launched in March 1980. It was prepared by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), with the advice and financial assistance of UNEP and the World Wildlife Fund, and in collaboration with FAO and UNESCO.

5/ General Assembly resolution 35/56, annex, paras. 41 and 156-158.

6/ Decision 10/2 on regional presence of UNEP, sect. III, regional presence in Latin America and Caribbean reads:

"The Governing Council

...

"1. Invites Governments of Latin America and the Caribbean to consider convening periodic intergovernmental regional meetings on the environment in Latin America and the Caribbean for the purpose of formulating policies and strategy for the region in this field;

"2. Requests the Executive Director to provide secretariat support for such intergovernmental regional meetings through the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean;

"3. Invites Governments of Latin America and the Caribbean to consider the possibility of holding meetings of government-nominated experts sufficiently in advance of sessions of the Governing Council to enable them to review the technical aspects of regional environmental programmes;

"4. Authorizes the Executive Director to strengthen the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean by providing it, within available resources and without prejudice to support for the Environment Co-ordination Unit in the Regional Commission for Latin America, with the necessary financial resources and staff for the full performance of the functions required under this decision, so that it can serve as an effective instrument for the co-ordination of co-operative environmental efforts in the region."

7/ The operative paragraphs of decision 10/3 on Regional Programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean, state:

"The Governing Council

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"1. Authorizes the Executive Director to convene a meeting of Government-nominated experts to elaborate a strategy for regional co-operative programmes on environmental matters and the priorities for implementing them, taking into account existing subregional programmes, as well as priorities indicated by national reports;

"2. Recommends that the expert meeting take into account among the aims for future intraregional co-operation on environmental affairs the strengthening of existing mechanisms for integration and the approval of specific agreements in co-operation in the environmental field;

"3. Further recommends that the United Nations Environment Programme develop guidelines for regional environmental programmes in consultation with the Governments of the region."