

CONSERVATION POLICY IN COSTA RICA
PRESIDENT LUIS ALBERTO MONGE

NATIONAL PARKS FOUNDATION
SAN JOSE, COSTA RICA



Luis Alberto Monge
Presidente de la Republica

SPEECH DELIVERED BY PRESIDENT LUIS ALBERTO MONGE ON THE OCCASION OF THE
SIGNING OF THE LAW RATIFYING THE EXECUTIVE DECREES ESTABLISHING THE
NATIONAL PARKS AND BIOLOGICAL RESERVES OF COSTA RICA

CASA PRESIDENCIAL
SAN JOSE, COSTA RICA
SEPTEMBER 16, 1982



Luis Alberto Monge
Presidente de la República

Ladies and Gentlemen:

When I received for my signature this law which ratifies the executive decrees establishing our national parks and biological reserves, I wanted to invite you, and the press, to join me for this signing ceremony, in order to convey to you, to all Costa Ricans and to the international scientific and conservation community, my sentiments on the subject of the conservation of the environment and our planet's natural resources.

Striving, as we are, toward the resolution of a severe economic crisis requiring short term action, we run the risk of losing the long term view of the Costa Rica we are going to bequeath to future generations, to those not yet born, who in reality constitute the majority of all Costa Ricans. This we must avoid at all costs.

This administration's program "Return to the Land" includes in its philosophy a deep commitment to conservation, a message concerning the necessary equilibrium between man's actions and the ecological limitations and the potential of the environment we live in.

"Return to the Land" is a program to provide our citizens with their basic needs for food, shelter, fiber, medicines and other needs, without diminishing the



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quality of the natural environment on which we depend for our existence.

I am aware that the resources necessary for sustained development and for man's very survival are being destroyed or exhausted at an accelerated pace. We are told that if these losses continue at their present rate, nearly a third of the crop land in the world will be rendered useless for agriculture by the end of this century. By the same time only half of the present area of unexploited, productive tropical forests will remain. A noted scientist, Dr. E. O. Wilson, estimates that the present world-wide rate of extinction is 1000 species per year. According to him, of all our actions in this decade, the one with the most far-reaching effects, which will have consequences for millions of years, is the destruction of natural systems and the concomitant loss of the species diversity and genetic reserves of the planet. This is the folly which our descendants will least be able to forgive.

I am also aware that Costa Rica's natural heritage is a treasure for ourselves and for all humanity. Our tropical abundance --more than 12,000 species of plants, 230 species of mammals, 800 or more species of birds, 150 species of reptiles and amphibians, and thousands of smaller species-- makes Costa Rica the country with perhaps the greatest diversity of plants and animals in so compact an area anywhere on earth. But, unfortunately, we are also destroying our forests at a rate of approximately 125,000 acres per year. If we continue



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like this, by the year 2000, less than 20 years from now, we will have to import wood for our own needs. This is tragic for a country endowed by God with such natural wealth, and it could bode ill for our enormous hydroelectric potential which depends on the forested cover of our watersheds.

Friends, this is the situation everywhere on the planet, without distinction between rich or poor nations. We have arrived at the point where the actions of one nation in utilizing its natural resources affect, either positively or negatively, all the nations on Earth.

Given this reality, all countries, and all individuals have the obligation to do what is necessary to correct the errors that have been committed. It is not enough to merely express our concern; it is necessary to act. On our actions, my friends, depend the very survival of our society and, in the final analysis, of our species.

Aware of this great responsibility, and within the limits of our resources, my administration is undertaking the programs demanded by a crisis of this extreme importance.

Reflecting on the conservation work carried out by our country during the last 10 to 15 years, I feel a profound respect and gratitude for the Costa Rican



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people and for all who have participated directly or indirectly in this great undertaking.

I feel a double responsibility on my shoulders: first to maintain and complete the work already begun, and, secondly, to add to it, knowing that what is not preserved during my administration, can never be preserved by anyone ever. Perhaps I will be the last President of Costa Rica who can create new and needed preserved areas, such as National Parks, biological reserves and forest reserves. My successors will only be able to modify them, or permit their destruction.

I have decided to accept this challenge and this responsibility. With the help and support of all Costa Ricans and of friends in many other countries who wish to aid us in this venture, we are going to complete the system of existing National Parks, and we are going to establish those new parks which are recommended by scientists as being of paramount importance.

Given our economic situation, perhaps this appears a little idealistic, but it is not so, my friends. My administration looks on conservation as a tool of economic development. Already citizen groups here and abroad are zealously seeking resources from the private sector to help us accomplish our conservation objectives. I thank them and urge them to continue onward. They have my personal support and the support of all the institutions of my administration,



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from whom I am also asking total cooperation.

I urge all Costa Ricans to join forces with groups such as the National Parks Foundation and ASCONA (Costa Rican Association for the Conservation of Nature) so that together with the Government of Costa Rica we can promote the rational use of natural resources and the conservation of our biological diversity.

I am very proud and happy to sign this law, by which the integrity of our National Parks is guaranteed in perpetuity. My heartfelt thanks to all of you for joining me on this solemn occasion.

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