

An Indigenous and Global South Perspective on the International Year of Ecotourism: Voices and Concerns of Those Marginalized by the IYE Celebration

Compiled by the Rethinking Tourism Project
For the World Ecotourism Summit
Quebec, Canada May 19-22, 2002



Participants at the International Forum on Indigenous Tourism, Oaxaca, Mexico 2002

This dossier of statements, resolutions, articles, and letters was compiled by the Rethinking Tourism Project (RTP) in May 2002.

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All articles and statements from the Clearinghouse for Reviewing Ecotourism can be found at <http://www.twinside.org.sg/title/iye.htm>. For more information on the campaign, please email tim-team@anet.net.th

I. Introduction

This dossier is a compilation of the statements, resolutions, articles, and letters critiquing the International Year of Ecotourism 2002 (IYE). This is our collective voice. It is meant to provide an alternative yet realistic analysis of the IYE as celebrated by the industry and development organizations.

The UN proclaimed the year 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism (IYE) in 1998. The purpose of this year as outlined by the UN was to encourage cooperation among governments, international and regional organizations and non-government organizations (NGOs) to promote sustainable development that protects the environment. The year focused on integrating the principles of sustainable development into the tourism industry.¹

The UN commissioned the World Tourism Organization (WTO) and the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) to the IYE. This included a series of regional meetings around the world in preparation for the World Ecotourism Summit, a two-day celebration held in Quebec in May 2002. However, most of these activities have had very little or no Indigenous Peoples' perspectives and thus virtually no realistic input of how ecotourism projects effect Indigenous economies, culture and biodiversity. Furthermore, despite the "celebration," there has been little direct funding or technical assistance for Indigenous communities and organizations – very few "trickle down" benefits from an industry that directly targets and develops our lands. As a result, a wide variety of voices representing different communities and coalitions from across the North and South have been calling for a fundamental reassessment of the IYE (<http://www.twinside.org.sg/title/iye.htm>). In addition, an International Forum on Indigenous Tourism was organized in direct response to the IYE in order to highlight serious concerns of ecotourism that are left out of the mainstream UN celebrations. Topics such as sovereignty, biopiracy, and community control and decision-making were the primary focus points at the Forum.

¹ Refer to UN Resolution 1998/40 at <http://www.un.org/documents/ecosoc/res/1998/eres1998-40.htm>

II.

STATEMENTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Declaration of *The International Forum on Indigenous Tourism, Oaxaca, Mexico, March 18-20, 2002.*

We, the delegates at the International Forum on Indigenous Tourism, have gathered in Oaxaca to share perspectives and deliberate on the consequences of tourism in our communities. We come from thirteen primarily Western Hemisphere countries, representing Indigenous communities that are participating in activities related to tourism development, nature conservation, reforestation, environmental education, cultural heritage, and agriculture. We do this mindfully independent from the U.N.'s ongoing "International Year of Ecotourism" (IYE) because we have grave concerns over the processes leading up to the IYE and its outcomes so far, and how they will impact Indigenous Peoples in the future.

We have been told that the IYE declaration is testimony to the importance of ecotourism to conserve lands, protect cultures, and encourage economic development. Yet the realities we are experiencing of ecological degradation and cultural erosion associated with tourism development under the influence of globalization suggest that the IYE does not go far enough in its review of ecotourism. For centuries, Indigenous Peoples have suffered from displacement and dispossession, and we see the incursion of the profit-driven global tourism industry as well as the rhetoric of "sustainable development" in the IYE as the latest threats to our lands and our communities.

Throughout the process leading up to the IYE, a clear division has developed between the actors promoting the year and worldwide movements of Indigenous Peoples rejecting it. Many have rejected the IYE because of its lack of transparency. We are especially concerned that the IYE has not sought the informed participation of Indigenous representatives in its planning. It is sadly reminiscent of recent problems over the process in which U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity developed guidelines for sustainable tourism and biodiversity, which were rushed without significant Indigenous input. Divergent perspectives, values, and interests must be taken into account in global initiatives like the IYE, and we affirm the internationally-recognized right and responsibility of Indigenous Peoples to be present in them.²

We register our profound disagreement with the IYE's and ecotourism's most basic assumptions that define Indigenous communities as targets to be developed and our lands as commercial resources to be sold on global markets. Under this universalistic economic framework, tourism brings market competition, appropriates our lands and peoples as consumer products, and renders our traditional knowledge vulnerable to bioprospecting and biopiracy. The IYE must not be used to legitimate the invasion and displacement of Indigenous territories and communities. Our lifeways and cultures are distinct, and we demand that the IYE and ecotourism's promoters acknowledge our fundamental rights to self-determination, prior informed consent, and the diverse ways that we choose to process and participate in such initiatives.

² These rights are confirmed by the Convention on Biological Diversity, International Labor Organization Agreement 169, the Draft Declaration of Indigenous Peoples' Rights to the OAS, and the U.N. Draft Declaration of Indigenous Peoples' Rights, among others.

To be sure, some ecotourism projects might be deemed successful because they have not disrupted local cultures and ecosystems. It is because these projects have been designed and implemented by Indigenous Peoples ourselves. These forms of tourism encompass the inherently holistic ways in which our communities are organized. They are based on and enhance our self-determination. They are protective of our biological and cultural diversity, sacred sites and rituals, and collective property and traditional resource rights. They affirm the fundamental ethical and spiritual dimensions of our relationships with the land and with each other.

Such forms of tourism cannot be based on concept-driven tourism development such as ecotourism, sustainable tourism, nature tourism, cultural tourism, ethnotourism, etc. Instead they are based on a long-term analysis of the pros and cons of tourism development, recognizing and following collective decision-making processes, and integrated into our long-term realities and visions of sustainable use and access to collective goods. An essential component of this is the right to decline tourism development at any point in the development process. So when we talk about "Indigenous Tourism," it is not just another marketing gimmick, but a broad category of distinctive ways in which Indigenous Peoples choose to implement tourism on our own terms.

The participants in this meeting have affirmed and determined to undertake the following:

1. Indigenous Peoples are not mere "stakeholders," but internationally-recognized holders of collective and human rights, including the rights of self-determination, informed consent, and effective participation.
2. Given that we have seen few positive results from the U.N.'s Decade of Indigenous Peoples, we do not put much stock in the effectiveness of this declaration to the U.N. We believe the real listeners of this message will be Indigenous Peoples and others who have respect for our ways of being. This declaration is also aimed at governments, conservation and ecotourism NGOs, academics, the tourism industry, and others who seek to "develop" us and our lands for tourism.
3. Indigenous Peoples are not objects of tourism development. We are active subjects with the rights and responsibilities to our territories and the processes of tourism planning, implementation, and evaluation that happen in them. This means we are responsible for defending Indigenous lands and communities from development that is imposed by governments, development agencies, private corporations, NGOs, and specialists.
4. Tourism is beneficial for Indigenous communities only when it is based on and enhances our self-determination. Outside "experts and assistance" are useful to us only if they work within frameworks conceptualized and defined by our communities. Therefore, tourism projects must be undertaken only under the guidance and surveillance

of an Indigenous Technical Team, and only after a full critical analysis of the long-term pros and cons of tourism development.

5. Indigenous Peoples must be the natural resource and wildlife managers of our own environments. Communities that fall within protected areas often experience oppression by governing agencies and lack of access to our own resources.

6. Indigenous Peoples must establish and strengthen strategies of coordination and information sharing both regionally and internationally, in order to assert participation in initiatives like the IYE. This meeting signals the birth of the Indigenous Tourism Network, that employs the sharing of information among Indigenous communities through newsletters, gatherings, regional workshops, emails, websites, video production, and other forms of communication that are independent of the self-promotional focus of the tourism industry.

7. We urge an honest and transparent commitment on the part of the United Nations and other international organizations to actively open doors for the direct participation of Indigenous Peoples. This includes dedicating funds and developing mechanisms for Indigenous Peoples' representatives to participate in the planning and execution of international initiatives like the IYE, and respect for the diverse ways that Indigenous communities make decisions about important initiatives that directly impact us.

8. We demand that national governments implement and respect laws and regulations regarding the environment and Indigenous communities.

9. We urge the development and implementation of guidelines and regulations for ecotourism development and visitation based on principles of respect for local cultures and the integrity of ecosystems. We consider illegitimate any drafting process that does not include the active and full participation of Indigenous Peoples.

Submitted to the World Ecotourism Summit on May 19, 2002.

AN OPEN STATEMENT ON THE UNEP DECLARATION OF 2002 AS “INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF ECOTOURISM”

By the LAKHUN Foundation (Cordillera Ancestral Development Center),
Philippines

Distributed via email from Giovanni Reyes, Managing Director

Most government and corporate institutions as well as ‘corporate NGOs’ and ‘State NGOs’ dichotomize between tourism, community-based tourism, sustainable tourism, equitable tourism, endemic tourism, etc. from so-called ‘Eco-tourism’, yet the ideas and process by which these have been implemented are of the same stock. These terminologies of the 1990s are precursors of today’s ‘eco-tourism’. After all, ecotourism is really nothing new as this has been on going since the 1960s, and only in the increased global concern on the environment due to commercial mass tourism has ‘ecotourism’ become the “buzzword” and recognized for what it is: **a World Bank/IMF prescription to integrate the world into one vast economic empire with the First World as its leader and trendsetter.**

In the Philippines, tourist destinations like the ‘world famous island of Boracay’ started with ecotourism, that is, visiting areas of unspoiled natural beauty, rustic accommodations and using candles, but over time, organized groups with big capital took over to control its coastal resources and its rich biodiversity. Resort developers with links to Transnational corporations came to the island to put up hotels and restaurants and a golf course in the name of national development and modernization. What occurred is maldevelopment: the destruction of the island people’s habitat, cultural lifeways, their impoverishment and alienation from society. In other nations of the Asia-Pacific, the impact has been most dramatic especially to the Kanaka Maolis of Hawaii, Motuans of Papua New Guinea, peasant farmers in Bogor, West Java, Indonesia, Langkawi Island, Malaysia to mention a few. In all these, the voices of Indigenous Peoples are hardly listened to and are shunted out in decision making about policies that impact on their lives.

Since ecotourism made it possible for IP communities to be easily reached by the would-be guardians of biodiversity and culture, it should also be able to allow indigenous peoples to reach out and find protection from the advancing forces of foreign and extraneous preservationists. As citizens of the international community, Indigenous Peoples rights are guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights. There is really nothing wrong in discovering the world and meeting other peoples. But things become wrong when physical displacement of communities take place and meeting other peoples is turned into a business and a few reap the megabuck profits.

We call on organizations who have the best interest of indigenous peoples at heart to expose the hegemonic imposition of globalizations’ so-called modern ideas, new approaches and processes about ecotourism as well as the cultural corruption that occur in these “eco-touristed” areas. With such development not being truly designed or even asked for by people themselves ‘ecotourism’ have simply become extensions of TNCs

because the key aspects of travel arrangements and accommodations remain under its control.

Thus, we re-iterate, ECOTOURISM is not really 'NEW' and an 'ALTERNATIVE' to the suicidal trajectory that captains of world capitalism has set the global planet into. As anyone familiar with corporate tricks will realize, the true alternative to pseudo-cultural and exploitative character of ecotourism is an empowered community that reject foreign imposition on their lives, redirecting tourism back to its original spirit of solidarity among peoples. Better still, solidarity for the common struggle against imperialist globalization that makes business out of people's social and cultural interaction.

Statement on the Process of the Regional Meeting on Community-Based Ecotourism in Southeast Asia held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, 3-7 March 2002

By a small group of individuals who gathered at the meeting

We, the participants/ representatives of our respective communities, indigenous peoples, friends and advocates of genuine developments from the different Southeast Asian countries, are gathered in Chiang Mai, Thailand, to attend the Regional Meeting on Community-Based Ecotourism.

We came here in good faith to share our situation and experiences on so-called DEVELOPMENT, tourism included, with our brother/sister Asians who are affected, directly or indirectly, by such and to discuss with other stakeholders such as government, tour operators possible areas of mutual understanding, support and cooperation.

We felt, however, that our participation in the conference was very limited. Only a few community representatives were able to attend the conference. We also felt that the conference was focused upon and designed around the profitability of the tourist industry and very minimal on the issues and concerns affecting us who are already host and/or being eyed as host to tourism, giving us the impression that we, the community people, are one of the commodities for market.

We are thankful to the researchers and scholars who did a very good research about us so that we finally found ourselves in the slides and on the screens for presentation. We would have been more grateful, however, if we were the ones given the chance and opportunity to talk and present our situations and experiences.

The dynamics in this conference as we have witnessed is, to us, a concrete example of globalization in its microcosm. We were invited to participate. You told us we are equal partners and that you encourage community participation, and so we travelled from far away places to talk with you, only to find out that conclusions ready to be imposed upon us have already been ironed out even before we arrived to this conference.

Again, we would like to reiterate that we, the indigenous peoples/ hilltribes/ ethnic minorities are not anti-development. We are for development, but a development that is liberating and empowering; a development that is sustainable and at the same time would ensure survival of our people and our culture.

We have to tell you that this conference has created in us a feeling of mistrust towards the business sectors who claim to help us develop. For how can we envision community participation in wider undertaking when even in a narrow arena like this conference we have today hardly have we found our place.

INTERVENTION - WORKING GROUP II
Participatory Mechanisms for Indigenous Peoples & Local Communities

Mr. Chair and Madame Co-Chair,
Thank you for opening the floor to NGOs for submissions. We are the International Support Centre for Sustainable Tourism.

We wish to draw your attention to the issue of mechanisms for participation, providing an important illustration from the tourism sector. The reason that we are focusing on tourism in our statement is that this sector is now being addressed under the topic of “Sustainable Use” and will be discussed at COPVI, parallel to Article 8(j). The CBD process on tourism provides timely lessons with regard to participation.

The CBD process on tourism has sped ahead, with a momentum all its own, producing draft guidelines. Meanwhile, the tourism industry is advancing with great speed into the territories of Indigenous Peoples, where high biodiversity remains, through a not so new form of mass tourism called “ecotourism”. If the Secretariat does not slow down in its deliberations on tourism, and the issuance of draft guidelines, Parties to the Convention will be promoting the very opposite of a precautionary approach.

Indigenous Peoples must be able to have confidence in processes established by the Secretariat. Mechanisms or guidelines that are developed without meaningful cooperation with Indigenous Peoples, will undermine prospects for relationship building based on mutual respect and understanding. Illustrating this are the draft guidelines on tourism arising from the Secretariat’s *Workshop on Biological Diversity & Tourism* in the Dominican Republic in June 2001. These draft guidelines are primarily the work of consultants. They do not reflect the rights of Indigenous Peoples, or submissions made by Indigenous Peoples’ organizations at the workshop. For reasons we have already submitted to SBSTTA VII, we maintain that the Santo Domingo workshop fell unnecessarily short of its potential as a participatory forum.

The current draft guidelines on tourism developed under the CBD give the impression that a comprehensive process has been undertaken to evaluate the role of tourism in biodiversity conservation. However, in actual fact, neither Indigenous Peoples, or NGOs working with Indigenous Peoples, have supported the existing process, because it has not been open, objective or truly participatory.

With this background, we wish to explain exactly why today’s topic of participation is of such great concern. In Santo Domingo, a second set of guidelines was briefly circulated, called *Draft Guidelines for the Conduct of Tourism in Territories Traditionally Occupied or Used by Indigenous & Local Communities*. The Secretariat said that the Working

Group on Article 8(j) produced these draft guidelines, which are specific to Indigenous Peoples. Yet NO Indigenous Peoples leadership globally, let alone Indigenous Peoples' organizations working on tourism, knew of their development, or participated in their development. This document is a mystery document to Indigenous Peoples, and remains so. The Secretariat released it briefly, then backtracked upon being advised in Santo Domingo that it would hold no legitimacy for Indigenous Peoples.

We are concerned that the Secretariat set this precedent of developing a mechanism with respect to Indigenous Peoples, without a proper process. Throughout the Santo Domingo deliberations on tourism, it was clear that biodiversity is indeed considered an asset, for sale to and by industry. There was no recognition there of the fact that the ecotourism industry (which is usually mistakenly assumed to be sustainable tourism) disproportionately impacts Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous Peoples are only just beginning to find out about the Santo Domingo workshop now, after the fact.

We ask the Secretariat to remember that it is Indigenous Peoples' sacred sites and lands that the tourism industry is developing as a "niche market" under the ecotourism banner. Furthermore, it is Indigenous Peoples communities, cultures and knowledge that are exploited worldwide in this phenomenon of industrial ecotourism, including through the misguided implementation of "protected areas." No other single industry has the potential to do more damage to biological and cultural diversity, or Indigenous Peoples rights, than tourism, if implemented outside the precautionary principle.

With this in mind, we respectfully request that the Secretariat:

- (1) Release to Indigenous Peoples its *Draft Guidelines for the Conduct of Tourism in Territories Traditionally Occupied or Used by Indigenous & Local Communities*, with a formal apology to Indigenous Peoples' leadership for the way this document was developed.
- (2) Ensure that future documents of this type are circulated within the 8(j) Working Group, and not confined to the separate topic of Sustainable Use.
- (3) Ensure that the need for future mechanisms or guidelines on tourism, and the nature of such mechanisms, is evaluated through a participatory process developed in cooperation with Indigenous Peoples, as per the spirit of Task 9.

Thank you Mr. Chair and Madame Co-Chair,

Alison Johnston, Director
INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT CENTRE FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM
sustour@axionet.com

Statement of the Indigenous Peoples Interfaith Dialogue on Globalisation and Tourism

Chiang Rai, Thailand: January 14-18, 2002

We, the delegates at the Indigenous Peoples Interfaith Dialogue on Globalisation and Tourism in Chiang Rai, Thailand, coming from Bangladesh, Bolivia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar (Burma), Nepal, Philippines, Taiwan and Thailand shared our collective experiences, and deliberated on the consequences of tourism under the strong influence of globalization on Indigenous Communities.

The Penang, Malaysia meeting on 'Mission Perspectives on Tourism' (2001) and other indigenous dialogues are reaffirmed by the need for intervening and influencing international processes such as International Year of Ecotourism 2002 (IYE-2002), United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and World Trade Organisation/ General Agreement on Trade in Services (WTO/GATS) negotiations, since we have a vital stake in changing the world order. The response to these global processes will emerge from a clearer understanding and recognition of the strong ethical and spiritual dimensions and survival spirit of Indigenous Peoples in the changing world.

The purpose of this interfaith dialogue was therefore to link the debate on the problems of globalisation and tourism with the lives of Indigenous Peoples. The paradigm of market driven liberalization and globalisation is lop sided and denies the pluralities of the peoples' lives, which have always valued sustainability of development. We felt that two international processes were important: the CBD (article 8j) and the decision to implement the IYE-2002. Both these events have not given due consideration and space to the manner in which indigenous peoples process their discussions and participation of all their affiliates and groups around the world. Therefore this meeting feels that their participation has not been considered in the processes underway.

International financial institutions such as Asian Development Bank (ADB), World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) as well as intergovernmental bodies like the WTO have taken positions on issues concerning indigenous peoples that have far-reaching consequences for their survival. These events and policies are likely to be ratified by the countries where indigenous peoples are struggling for recognition and the affirmation of their rights.

We feel that there is a need for a united position, which carries all the peoples and their movements against the ramifications of these policies, together to contribute to the creation of a just and equal world. The basis of this common understanding should reflect the view that the primary rights holders of our lands, resources and ecological wealth are the Indigenous Peoples.

The Secretariat of the CBD has rushed through, without due consultation, to circulate a draft of global guidelines for activities related to sustainable tourism and biodiversity. The process has been questioned by Indigenous Peoples' Organizations and Non

Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Whereas these guidelines have serious implications for the lives and livelihoods of indigenous peoples, they have not been given the time or the platform to present their considered opinion on the guidelines. In fact they have questioned the need for global guidelines since their life worlds are distinct and their cultures diverse.

The meeting calls for an immediate reconsideration and review of the global guidelines pending the informed participation and deliberation by Indigenous Peoples and their organisations. For this purpose this meeting has suggested that a plan of action be developed to ensure that these guidelines are not presented to the CBD Conference of Parties (COP) in April without the substantive participation by Indigenous Peoples and advocates.

There are two drafts in circulation. One is the official draft circulated by the secretariat of the CBD. The other is a revised draft by NGOs at a workshop in Delhi. We would like all concerned to look at these drafts and send in their amendments to United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the CBD secretariat so that wider discussion and concerns can be represented in a transparent and democratic manner.

We demand that the CBD consider our amendments to the Drafts mentioned above for which adequate time and space be given to our views on the issue of guidelines which will be binding on us through our governments. Unless we are given this time, we will not consider these guidelines to be a part of the stakeholder process that has been established through the UNCSD process.

The World Council of Churches (WCC), Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism (ECTWT) and other fraternal networks can project this issue in their consultations to take the participatory process further. They could support regional and sub-regional workshops to ensure that all parties respect the dignity, right to life, and protection of fundamental rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Similarly, the IYE-2002 is being launched on January 28 in (New York). We view this as a hasty process and since the basic principle of transparency in decision making was not observed, we feel that our critique of ecotourism as a form of commercial tourism reinforcing the process of dispossession of indigenous peoples by destroying their life systems has been disregarded. This meeting calls for non-cooperation with the IYE. To convey our decision we are sending this statement as a strong protest to the UNEP and informing them of our reasons for non-cooperation.

We believe that further work needs to be done by our organizations to demystify the belief in the sustainability of ecotourism and its economic benefits. We feel that it is important for Indigenous Peoples to articulate their own experience with tourism and reflect on its impacts and meaning. We also feel that it is necessary to point out the vulnerability of the tourism industry and evaluate the impacts of the Asian Financial Crisis and '9/11' on the future of tourism in the developing world.

We are also concerned with the increase in the number of protected areas and the expansion of tourism into other natural and rural areas and communities which has played a role in the displacement of Indigenous Peoples. We see the IYE-2002 initiative as part of the dispossession process through increased privatisation and globalisation. We demand that all opening up of new areas and any unfinished projects in the name of IYE-2002 be stopped.

Tourism in the context of globalisation brings in market competition, appropriates lands and resources of indigenous communities, and forces Indigenous Peoples to become showcases and "human museum exhibits". Indigenous Peoples are becoming increasingly vulnerable to exploitation by bioprospectors and biopirates, where traditional wisdom and knowledge and natural resources have been expropriated for business interests.

We affirm the a priori rights of Indigenous Peoples to their traditional lands, territories, and resources, the integrity of which has been sustained by generations through their traditional way of life in harmony with nature.

We uphold that the traditional values and very fabric of Indigenous Peoples systems, which include social, cultural, resource management, belief, education, agricultural, technological, political, judicial, health, and economic systems, can contribute alternatives to our current human, economic and environmental crises.

We recognize the strong ethical and spiritual dimensions, and the survival spirit of indigenous peoples in the changing world.

The modern tourism industry leaves limited choices to indigenous communities to reject it. They are trapped by the powerful corporate interests at work, the lure of economic incentives, and the perception that it will enable the preservation of indigenous cultures and traditions.

Indigenous Peoples have come to realize that much have been lost while gaining little under the process of globalization and expansion of tourism. The representatives of Indigenous Peoples organizations and movements, participating in this meeting urge to strive for regaining indigenous peoples rights as understood by their communities and as recognized under existing international rights covenants, conventions, and laws.

The representatives of indigenous communities have expressed their determination to implement the following plans and strategies to uphold their rights in the face of mounting challenges of commercial tourism:

1. Informal education for the community and incorporation of indigenous knowledge systems into the curriculum of formal schooling as a way of passing down the traditional wisdom and values will be given the top priority.

2. More active global networking among indigenous organizations and supporting groups, strong indigenous rights advocacy and campaigns in the United Nations system, and other international organizations and bodies will be promoted.

3. Recognising the importance of sharing of information, newsletters, email groups and other forms of communication will be launched. Exchanges amongst indigenous leaders at the grass-root level will be encouraged. News on traditional events in indigenous communities will be circulated among this collective. Local level workshops, seminars and community training on tourism will be organized to provide alternative perspectives on tourism and cultural exchanges.

4. Understanding the diverse political systems within which Indigenous Peoples organizations negotiate their struggles, the collective would adopt flexible strategies in its campaigns. In this context, we urge Asian Governments to recognize the land rights, human rights and right to citizenship of indigenous peoples as integral to the democratization process.

5. It is important for indigenous peoples to articulate their own experience with tourism and reflect on its impacts and meaning. It is this view that should form the basis for future action. WCC (World Council of Churches), ECTWT (Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism/ECOT-Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism) and other international organisations can provide for such regional studies by Indigenous Peoples.

Conference of the Ecumenical Coalition of Third World Tourism (ECTWT)/ ECOT (Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism) "Indigenous Peoples Interfaith Dialogue on Globalisation and Tourism", Chiang Rai, Thailand: January 14-18, 2002

*For more information on the Conference **Indigenous Peoples Interfaith Dialogue on Globalisation and Tourism**, you may contact the World Council of Churches (Bishop Eugenio Poma epa@wcc-coe.org) or the Ecumenical Coalition of Third World Tourism (Rev. Tan Chi Kiong contours@pacific.net.hk).*

INTERVENTION - SBSTTA VII Session
U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity
Montreal, Canada: November 2001

Madame/Mr. Chair,

Thank you for opening the floor to NGOs for submissions. We are the International Support Centre for Sustainable Tourism.

We are here today to draw your attention to serious omissions in the process established to develop guidelines on tourism under the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity. As we have noted several times previously within U.N. forums, it is very disturbing that the U.N. International Year of Ecotourism (IYE) in 2002 has been approved, with the explicit mandate of promoting ecotourism. Most forms of ecotourism are simply mass tourism, and are already known to have devastating impacts on biological diversity at the ecosystem level. Ecotourism is particularly damaging to Indigenous Peoples, who have maintained high biological diversity within their traditional territory over generations and millennia; their homelands and cultures are now the prime target globally for rapid commercialization and exploitation by the ecotourism industry. The only successful models for tourism involving Indigenous Peoples are those designed by Indigenous Peoples themselves, on the basis of their own traditional knowledge, practices and innovation systems, including their own customary laws.

Given these trends, and the risk that the ecotourism industry poses to both biological diversity and cultural diversity, we ask you to take note that the process within the CBD to prepare for the IYE has omitted any meaningful involvement of Indigenous Peoples. Specifically, we are concerned about the following:

- The *Workshop on Biological Diversity & Tourism* (Dominican Republic, June 2001) was announced to just a handful of Indigenous Peoples' organizations only 2 months prior; thus, there was inadequate due diligence by the CBD Secretariat to ensure broad or effective involvement by Indigenous Peoples. Furthermore, no funds were provided to ensure Indigenous Peoples' readiness, e.g. prior coordination and analysis.
- In the preparatory package for the *Workshop on Biological Diversity & Tourism*, the CBD Secretariat issued a paper titled Draft Guidelines for the Conduct of Tourism in Territories Traditionally Occupied or Used by Indigenous & Local Communities (UNEP/CBD/WS-Tourism/2). The Secretariat subsequently withdrew these guidelines, and withheld factual information on their authorship. It told NGOs that the CBD Working Group on Article 8(j) had drafted them, and did not admit until the last day that the Secretariat itself produced them. These draft guidelines are not only illegitimate, but poorly reflect the Rights, values and interests of Indigenous Peoples. They should never have been conceived or circulated as an official draft document.
- The Report of the Workshop on Biological Diversity & Tourism does not accurately reflect the discussion held within the four working groups in Santo Domingo. Our organization presented a set of over 20 concise technical recommendations

concerning the involvement of Indigenous Peoples; each of these recommendations was approved by consensus in the working group, yet none appeared in the workshop report, despite the written text being supplied to the workshop rapporteur.

- For the United Nations supported NGOs meeting on the IYE in New Delhi, India (September 2001), not only did the funding timeline prohibit meaningful Indigenous Peoples' and NGOs involvement, but UNEP circulated necessary documents just three days ahead. As a result, those Indigenous Peoples' organizations aspiring to attend could not properly consult with their leadership or Elders, as per customary protocol and standard membership practice. This style of organizing official meetings connected with the IYE is preventing Indigenous Peoples from building any capacity to effectively comment on principles and practices for sustainable tourism.

In consideration of these concerns, we urge the CBD Secretariat to work together with UNEP and partnering state governments to ensure that Indigenous Peoples' proposals to host meetings in preparation for the IYE, and more importantly, for IYE follow-up, are fully supported with both logistical and capacity funding. It is imperative that Indigenous Peoples have the opportunity and institutional support to prepare and present their own analyses at the *U.N. World Summit on Ecotourism* in May 2001, and all subsequent U.N. discussions on tourism.

We submit our statement today with the full support and agreement of the Rethinking Tourism Project, which an Indigenous Peoples' organization based in the USA.

Thank you,

Alison Johnston, Director
INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT CENTRE FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM
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Endorsed by:

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Michael Anderson	The Sovereign Union of First Peoples	Australia

2002: INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF REVIEWING ECOTOURISM

NGO statement to government delegates at the UN

From Tourism Investigation and Monitoring Team
A Statement in the Clearinghouse for REVIEWING Ecotourism

We, a coalition of NGOs, would like to inform you that the UN General Assembly's resolution (1998/40) to declare 2002 as International Year of Ecotourism (IYE) has generated considerable anxiety and apprehension for a number of reasons.

Given the many uncertainties and the deepening controversy surrounding the UN-initiated programme in its present form, we would also like to explore whether the UNGA can move to refocus and rename the event 'International Year of REVIEWING Ecotourism' as we have already proposed in a letter to Secretary General Kofi Annan.

We believe there is an urgent need for a fundamental re-assessment of ecotourism because evidence has been mounting that it is largely an unsuccessful attempt to bring forth sustainable development, and the dangers inherent in ecotourism are worse than it was first recognized. This should be of particular concern for governments of developing countries that are primarily targeted by global industry forces as ecotourism destinations, who need to be cautious about the viability of tourism in terms of its economic, social, cultural and environmental sustainability.

Since the IYE was approved three years ago in 1998, we suggest it is necessary to consider new developments and trends, especially those affecting destination countries in the South. These include:

- 1) From many recent studies and reports disclosing realities on the ground, it can be concluded that, while ecotourism has been presented as a negotiated response to the imperatives of ecological preservation and community development, the profit-hungry tourism industry has opted for ecotourism, simply to use it as a marketing ploy with little or no regard for environmental and social justice issues. Many researchers agree that ecotourism is an activity overly dominated by North-based corporations that exposes developing countries and marginalized social groups to new dependencies and hardships.
- 2) What has been generally overlooked in ecotourism discussions is that from a Southern perspective, the macro-economic climate is not conducive but has become outright hostile to forms of tourism that seek to prioritize more even distribution of benefits and environmental preservation.

A new UNCTAD study, presented at a OECD seminar during the International Tourism Exchange (ITB) in Berlin last March warns, for example, that despite developing countries' efforts to develop the most suitable policies, the viability of their tourist industries is increasingly undermined by external forces beyond their control, including the impact of financial "leakages" (the outflows of foreign exchange earnings generated by tourism) that can easily reach levels up to 75 per cent. The UNCTAD study notes,

“The predatory practices and anti-competitive behaviour of a few tourism suppliers based in tourist-generating countries have two main effects on the economic viability of the tourism in developing countries: unbalanced trade benefits, and the deepening of the leakage effect. Their combined impact minimize the positive impacts of spillover and multiplier effects inherent to tourism, and undermine the financial capacity of enterprises and the ability of countries to earmark necessary resources to maintain and upgrade basic infrastructure and quality standards in order to satisfy in an adequate way competitive conditions and international demand.”

In view of this, we hope that Southern governments will not let themselves be carried away by the dubious promises of ecotourism, but, as the UNCTAD study suggests, concentrate on re-negotiating commitments under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) system to remove the existing asymmetries in international tourism. In the long term, equitable trading conditions for economic sustainability may be of the best interest of developing countries as this forms the base for socially and environmentally sustainable development, in tourism and in general.

3) Many governments in the South are alarmed about the tremendous increase of biopiracy cases and new international regulations on patents and intellectual property rights (IPRs) that favour North-based biotechnology corporations because it can cause immeasurable losses for their countries.

Ecotourism has been offered as a means to protect biodiversity and to provide for sustainable utilization of biological resources, but it can no longer be denied that nature-based forms of tourism also pose a great new threat in relation to bio-plundering, patenting and IPR. There has been the observation that prospectors and collectors often travel to biodiversity-rich areas as “tourists” to illegally collect genetic resources, plants and wildlife as well as associated knowledge with commercial value for the biotechnology industry.

This trend is unfortunately abetted by research institutions, conservation organizations and development agencies, including the Global Environment Facility, that support projects combining biological research, pharmaceutical prospecting and ecotourism activities. Since such activities may result in huge “invisible leakages” that even exceed the earnings from ecotourism, countries and inter-governmental bodies such as the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) should be extremely cautious and as soon as possible introduce adequate legislation and monitoring systems to control bio-prospecting, thereby taking into account the danger of ecotourism as a major channel for biopiracy.

While these and other burning issues need to be urgently addressed in relation to the IYE, the preparations for the event coordinated by UNEP and the World Tourism Organization (WTO-OMT) have been pursued in a grey area. For instance, it is not clear what actually led to the UNGA approval of the IYE and what was the original intention. This is a major handicap because despite many years of debate, there is no agreement even on the definition and meaning of ecotourism, due to divergent perspectives, values and interests of concerned parties. Subsequently, it is impossible to achieve consensus on an agenda and objectives for the IYE.

In the process, a clear division has developed between actors favouring promotion and commercialization of ecotourism as a major goal of the IYE, and a growing worldwide movement of public interest and indigenous peoples organizations that reject the IYE as a promotional and business-oriented campaign.

Both UNEP and the WTO-OMT have not been able to resolve the great contradictions and deepening conflict of interests. Nor have they made serious efforts to involve civil society organizations in the planning and decision-making process and to foster broad-based discussion on ecotourism-related themes. Confronted with growing criticisms and protests, both agencies have declared that the UN has not given any instructions nor provided funds for the IYE.

Since the entire programme has been heavily constrained by lack of orientation and growing polarization, we request that you discuss the many problems related to the IYE at the next UNGA meeting in September.

In particular, we call on governments:

- 1) To put forward, at the UNGA, a clear statement of purpose and guidelines regarding the content and process of the IYE in order to assist UNEP, the WTO-OMT and other concerned parties in the implementation of the programme.
- 2) To help design the programme in a way that public interest - such as ecological protection, economic equity, social justice and human rights - take precedence over narrow and short-sighted industry interests.
- 3) To change the name of the event into “International Year of REVIEWING Ecotourism” (IYRE) and to provide for the establishment of an independent commission on ecotourism that will conduct a fundamental reassessment of ecotourism-related issues with the expertise from all concerned parties. As for the latter, we believe that the WTO-OMT is not appropriate to oversee this commission because its prime goal is to promote the tourism industry, which contradicts the need for broad-based and critical studies and analyses of tourism, including ecotourism.

We are bringing this matter to your attention as we are deeply concerned that the IYE will be particularly dangerous for developing countries. However, since governments and civil society organizations from the South have become more articulate and assertive of

their rights in the international arena as a result of globalization impacts, we are confident that they can also play a prominent and decisive role in the debates of international tourism-related programmes, such as the IYE, and intercede for changes if they are likely to adversely affect their countries.

Finally, we would like to invite you to visit our website <http://www.twinside.org.sg/title/iye.htm> for background information on the IYE and to make use of our electronic information service 'Clearinghouse for REVIEWING Ecotourism' (contact Email: tim-team@access.inet.co.th.)

Yours sincerely,

Third World Network
Tourism Investigation and Monitoring Team (Thailand)
Sahabat Alam Malaysia
Consumers Association of Penang (Malaysia)
CorpWatch (USA)

SUB- Resolution on the UN International Year of Eco Tourism-2002

Signed by Participants at National Conference on Human Rights, Social Movements, Globalization and the Law at Panchgani in India, April 5, 2001

Dear Madam/Sir:

Over 1,500 activists, representatives of non governmental organisations, tribal communities and people's movements including Judges from India and abroad came together during the last week of December, 2000 to attend the National Conference on Human Rights, Social Movements, Globalisation and the Law organised by the India Centre for Human Rights and Law, Human Rights Law Network, Centre for Social Justice and Drishti Media Collective and nearly 60 other organisations from around the country. The objective being to share experiences of the various groups on the Judicial System, to build organisational links, exchange information and co-operate in campaigns and investigations into human rights violations.

The multifaceted themes deliberated upon and discussed in the conference both in Plenary and in Parallel sessions included nearly 25 critical issues ranging from Globalisation, Human rights, Environment, Women, Children and Adivasi rights. This conference was unique in as many as 40 sitting judges of the various High Courts and Supreme Court of India and leading judicial personalities from various countries attended.

EQUATIONS, an NGO working on tourism concerns based at Bangalore participated in sessions and led discussions on (a) Adivasi Rights (b) Environment, and (c) Commercial sexual exploitation of children. It also had indirect interventions in the sessions on Globalisation and Women.

The Adivasi Rights session had indepth deliberations in terms of its content and trends in which nearly 60 activists participated. EQUATIONS initiated and led the discussion on Eco Tourism. The NGO highlighted the conflicts between development, conservation and needs of local communities in sensitive areas where Eco- tourism has been indiscriminately promoted as a development option.

In the light of these conflicts in Eco-tourism areas the imperative need to protest against the UN Declaration of 2002 as International Year of Eco-tourism was emphasized. As an outcome of the discussion, the participants unanimously resolved to protest the declaration of year 2002 as International Year of Eco Tourism.

Attached below is the resolution passed against the Year Of Eco-Tourism with the signatories.

RESOLUTION ON ECO-TOURISM

* When the U N proclaimed 2002 as the International Year of Eco- tourism; many NGO's who have been monitoring tourism impacts went on the alert. In October 2001 an international coalition of environmental, human rights and indigenous people's groups launched a call for the fundamental reassessment of the UN Eco- tourism year 2002.

* NGO's are extremely concerned that this UN endorsement of Eco- tourism in light of all the fundamental problems related to the industry - in many cases another green wash - will destroy more bio diversity and harm even more local communities.

* We the undersigned NGO's and people's movements feel compelled to warn all concerned parties not to skirt the critical issues of Eco- tourism and the fact that a mountain of money will be spent on projects initiated around the international year of eco- tourism order to boost the eco tourism industry.

* In contrast to advocates who tend to portray eco tourism development as a means to protect bio- diversity and enhance the well being of local people, we are gravely concerned that this IYE will result in a disastrous situation for local communities and the environment in destination countries.

* From Thailand to Belize, Eco- tourism has opened the doors to more forest destruction. Indigenous peoples in affected areas have been forced out of their traditional lands in some cases.

* Reports are also growing that "tourists" are illegally collecting forest plants with potential medicinal value for the biotechnology industry.

* We also denounce the lack of transparency and failure to meaningfully involve indigenous peoples and southern organizations in ongoing preparations.

Signatories:

1. Lakshmikanth, Nagarika Sevatrust, Bangalore
2. Benny Kuruvilla, EQUATIONS, Bangalore
3. CR Bijoy, All India Coordinating Forum of Adivasi and Indigenous Peoples, Coimbatore
4. Murugan M, Vishwa Maithri, Kerala
5. Shyama Sivadas, Thiruvananthapuram
6. Vidya Udyan, Student, Ahmedabad
7. Satchit Bhandartiar, YUVA, Nagpur
8. Loba Khillo, SPVK, Nobarnpure Orrisa
9. Loda Dissi, IRDWSI, Kojaput Orrisa
10. Kojaput Orrisa, Vishwa Mythri, Kerala
11. Pragada Chakralau, Samata, Hyderabad
12. K Manmadhalau, Adivasimitra, Paderu Vishakapatnam

13. K Venkata Rao, TERDS, Korra Vishakapatnam
14. Madhav Dalapathi, IRAWSI, Koraput Orrisa
15. Chatur Murmu, IRAWSI, Nubaranpur Umurkote Orissa
16. Murgu Pajari, IRAWSI, Kuruputa Semmiligudi Orrisa
17. Bisnu Sargaye, IRAWSI, Yagpur Koraput Orrisa
18. Laba Mill, IRAWSI, Woburerupur Orrisa
19. Pankaj Sekhsaria, Kalpavrish, Pune
20. Pidika Ramagumai, K.B.S/R.A.D, Mekda PostBanbhuga Kuruputa
21. Kanch Kohli, Kalpavrish, Delhi
22. Manju Menon, Kalpavrish, Pune
23. Rajendra Kumar K, SUJANA
24. B Sanjeeva Rao, Velugu Srikakulam Dist Andhra Pradesh
25. P Deverullu, Sanjeevani, Vishakapatnam Andhra Pradesh
26. Neeraj Vagholikar, Kalpavrish, Pune
27. JK Babu, Tribal Activist, Nagarhole Karnataka
28. JP Raju, Tribal Activist, Nagarhole Karnataka
29. Sujatha Padhmanabhan, Kalpavrish, Pune
30. Krishnamoorthy, EQUATIONS, Bangalore
31. Haribabu, EQUATIONS, Bangalore
32. Shirley Susan, EQUATIONS, Bangalore
33. Sindhu Mathew, EQUATIONS, Bangalore
34. S.R.Hiremath, President, JAN VIKAS ANDOLAN AND NCPNR, Dharwar
35. Sandeep Kindo, Activist, Ranchi
36. Meghnath, AKHRA, Ranchi
37. Sarbani Sarkar, Adivasi Rights Law Network, New Delhi
38. Demur, Gujarat Adivasi Vikas Samaj, Anand District, Gujarat
39. Kelal, Adivasi (Irula), Pallakkad Kerala
40. Anil, EKTA PARISHAD, Bhubaneshwar Orrisa
41. U.N.Mohanf, DFF, Dhanbad
42. Priya Bhogaovkee, University Student, San Francisco CA, USA
43. Vijay Ghuguskor, KHOJ, Paratwada, Amravati district, Maharashtra
44. Aeund Shett, KHOJ, Paratwada, Amravati district, Maharashtra
45. SiddhaSaj Solanki, AAKVS, Ahmedabad
46. Kaluram Dhodade, Bhoomisana, Palghar Maharashtra
47. Bansi Ghevale, Jagrut Kashtagari Sanghatana, Rajgad Maharashtra
48. Bijoy, Adivasi Mukti Sangathan, Badwani, Madhya Pradesh
49. Amit Kowe, Adivasi Jan Sangharsh Samiti, Nagpur
50. Agnes Eben, House Workers Movement
51. C.K.V.Dhruva, Lawyer, Chennai
52. Surekha & Raghav Anurag Modi, Shahpur, Betul
53. Purnima Upadhyay, Paratwada, Amravati district, Maharashtra
54. Baiya Lis, Activist, Paratwada, Amravati district, Maharashtra
55. Ashish Kothari, Kalpavrish, Pune
56. K.Bhanumathi, SAMATA, Hyderabad
57. Pravin, SAMATA, Hyderabad

III.

Articles and Position Papers

International Year of Ecotourism: Southern Perspectives

In *In Focus, The Magazine of Tourism Concern*, Special Edition dedicated to Ecotourism, Spring 2002, Issue 42 – “Ecotourism: Just another label?”

MEXICO, Oaxaca, March 18-20, 2002

200 leader of rural participants from Indigenous communities representing over twenty countries attended the International Forum on Indigenous Tourism to discuss ecotourism.

The aim of the forum was to search for sustainable alternatives to traditional tourism, to learn from each other's efforts, and to forge a strong Mexico network on tourism.

Indigenous leaders presented case studies of sustainable tourism projects that have succeeded in maintaining local autonomy and benefiting communities who have been impacted negatively by tourism development, issues such as sustainability, biodiversity, community empowerment and self-governance were discussed.

The Oaxaca Declaration on Indigenous tourism, prepared by participants of the Forum especially in regard to the International Year of Ecotourism (2002) will be delivered to the World Ecotourism Summit and the Rio+10 meetings in South Africa during 2002 by Indigenous representatives of the Forum.

The declaration outlines Indigenous Peoples concerns about ecotourism that have been omitted in UN-sponsored IYE preparatory meetings, discussions and recommendations. It makes recommendations for the UN, the industry, academics and NGOs working with Indigenous Peoples in any capacity to develop ecotourism based on Indigenous Peoples' own needs, experience and Indigenous models of sustainability.

Key issues and recommendations from the Forum:

- Ecotourism is promoted as a way to conserve and protect lands and culture, yet it has had devastating impacts on the environment, including loss of biological and cultural diversity and the degradation of entire ecosystems. As Indigenous Peoples, we are suffering from displacement and dispossession of our traditional territories and lands and the disruption of our local economies due to ecotourism expansion by the global industry.
- Some ecotourism projects have been successful in that they have not disrupted the local economy, traditional culture or the ecosystem. These projects have been designed and implemented by Indigenous Peoples ourselves.
- There is no international consensus on what constitutes ecotourism, and much of what is being called ecotourism continues to threaten and destroy biodiversity. Communities are developing their own definitions for their tourism projects.
- Besides destroying the natural environments in which we live, tourism threatens traditional life by permanently altering the social, cultural and economic systems on which we depend. There is a need for more education and transparency from government and NGOs on ecotourism projects.

- Indigenous Peoples must be able to participate in decision-making processes in issues that affect us. Existing laws must be enforced with respect to Indigenous Peoples rights.
- The organizations of the United National responsible for Indigenous issues should provide resources to strengthen and develop sustainable communities.
- These issues as well as many others have not been addressed and urgently need to be addressed before proceeding with the IYE. Furthermore, the definition and meaning of ecotourism need to be debated in open and inclusive venues where all voices, especially indigenous voices, can be heard.

This conference was hosted by the Rethinking Tourism Project (RTP) and Instituto de la Naturaleza y la Sociedad de Oaxaca (INSO). The full Oaxaca Declaration is available from RTP: Tel (001) 651 644 9984, info@rethinkingtourism.org or visit www.rethinkingtourism.org.

Article printed in *Tourism In Focus*. A magazine from TourismConcern, Stapleton House, 277-281 Holloway Road, London N7 8HN. Email: info@tourismconcern.org.uk

The International Year of Ecotourism in an Age of Uncertainty

By Luis A. Vivanco, Professor at University of Vermont and a member of the planning committee for the International Forum on Indigenous Tourism

Presented at the University of Vermont Environmental Symposium in October 2001

Ecotourism has moved out of its childhood, a period marked by triumphant and prescriptive declarations, and moved into a more awkward, even troubled, adolescence. Nowhere is this more clear than in the declaration of, and vigorous reactions to, 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism (IYE) by the United Nations.

Since 1998, when the IYE was proposed, a growing chorus of voices from the grassroots around the world has been calling into question the wisdom and motivations of the IYE, if not ecotourism itself. This is not simply because ecotourism continues to be ill-defined (most definitions hold vaguely that it unites the conservation of nature with the economic development of local communities through tourism), but because its impacts, benefits, and futures continue to be hotly contested.

In the age of uncertainty unfolding since the events of September 11, 2001, concerns and debates over ecotourism have gained new urgency: as the number of bookings to destinations has dropped, the ecotourism industry's staunchest promoters have declared that rural communities and the conservation of nature in the South are at risk and that, according to the International Ecotourism Society (one of the IYE's planners), "Who really gets hurt are those who provide the services - the lodging operator, the growers of food, the people who provide the transportation." In light of such arguments and events, the IYE's rhetoric of ecotourism's importance for global economic and environmental security is sure to heat up in 2002.

The voices critical of the IYE are diverse and decentralized, reflecting the concerns of indigenous peoples, human rights and social justice groups, tourism monitoring groups, environmentalists, communities at the grassroots, academics, and in some cases, development workers and government officials. But their perspectives and organizing efforts have at least three common themes: 1) they seek to raise awareness that ecotourism is an ill-conceived development experiment imposed on Southern peoples and landscapes, and that it is less benign and beneficial than its promoters have declared; 2) they question the wisdom of the U.N.'s approach to the IYE and are trying to force it to clarify or reorient its objectives; and 3) they are proposing and organizing alternative venues in which to critically analyze the structural inequalities and foundational contradictions inherent to ecotourism, independent of what many consider to be the universalistic and self-promotional venue of the IYE.

The purpose of this article is to examine the stated objectives and themes of the IYE, characterize the criticisms against it and ecotourism more broadly, and explore the alternative political and cultural visions of tourism and ecology embedded in how the different communities and groups have responded. At the very least, these critics are challenging the IYE's uncritical foundation on the market-driven and globalist mythologies of sustainable development, while offering alternative ways to think about

and engage in tourism. They also exhibit trends in the broader anti-globalization mobilizations of recent years: the emergence of politically and culturally-pluralistic coalitions operating in decentralized and horizontal fashion, imagining and generating non-prescriptive alternatives at both place-based and translocal scales.

These themes are reflected in a particular organizing effort that I will discuss, the International Forum on Indigenous Tourism, based in Oaxaca, Mexico, that brings into dialogue a wide and geographically-diffuse variety of cultural and political perspectives on tourism. Although it is planned to coincide with the IYE, its aims and methods differ profoundly from the top-down and development-driven vision of the IYE. The IYE is certainly a key milestone in ecotourism's adolescence, and at stake in it and the processes around it is the widespread legitimacy of ecotourism for those who are targeted for its development.

Alternative venues like the one in Oaxaca are not based on a simplistic rejection of tourism, but are trying to ensure that, at the very least, ecotourism's processes of maturation do not undermine the very peoples and landscapes it claims to benefit. More importantly, they argue for forms of tourism based on paradigms of pluralism and ecological sustainability through community self-determination.

International Year of Ecotourism: Objectives and Themes In November 1998, the U.N. General Assembly voted to designate 2002, which would also be the International Year of Mountains, as the International Year of Ecotourism. The U.N. Commission on Sustainable Development mandated the U.N. Environmental Program (UNEP) and the World Tourism Organization (WTO/OMT) to prepare and coordinate activities for the year. The designation of the year is intended to encourage intensified cooperative efforts by governments and nongovernmental organizations to achieve Agenda 21's aims of promoting economic growth and the protection of the environment: "The U.N. declaration is a testimony of the growing importance of ecotourism, not only as a sector with a great potential for economic development especially in remote areas where few other possibilities exist but also as a powerful tool for conservation of the natural environment if it is properly planned, developed and managed."

In partnership with three Northern nongovernmental organizations, The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), Conservation International (CI), and Ecological Tourism Europe (ETE), the UNEP and WTO/OMT have begun to publicize the objectives and themes of the IYE.

Even while recognizing the need to avoid ecotourism's "past shortcomings and negative impacts," the IYE proposes to: 1) review the potential contribution of ecotourism to sustainable development and to strengthen the capacity of governments and other organizations interested in using it as a development tool; 2) exchange information on "best practices" and lessons learned in the planning, marketing and development of products; 3) advance both knowledge on the impacts of ecotourism and the effectiveness of regulatory and voluntary schemes for controlling and monitoring those impacts; 4) review the experiences and lessons learned from the participation of local communities

and indigenous peoples; 5) encourage responsible behavior in the field; and 6) define new areas of stakeholder collaboration.

These discussions will take place in a series of regional preparatory meetings and a World Ecotourism Summit during May 2002 in Quebec City, as well as any venues that member states, non-governmental organizations, or businesses choose to implement on their own.

The stated aims of the regional preparatory meetings, sponsored and organized by UNEP, WTO/OMT, and their NGO partners, are to provide more intimate settings in which to convene stakeholders and practitioners who are not likely to have voice at the World Ecotourism Summit. Although it is not yet clear to whom this refers, this most likely includes small business operators, representatives of indigenous peoples and local communities, and regional and nongovernmental groups. The meetings cover large and diverse areas (i.e., 'Africa,' 'Central America,' etc.) but have a common framework focused on the following themes: 1) planning and product development; 2) monitoring and regulation; 3) marketing and promotion; and 4) ecotourism's costs and benefits. Other "cross-cutting themes" include the socio-cultural, environmental, and economic dimensions of ecotourism, and the informed participation of local communities. The charge of each preparatory meeting is to develop a strategic analysis of these themes, and prepare a report to be presented at the World Ecotourism Summit.

Contesting the IYE

Since its inception, the IYE has been aggressively marketed as a celebration of ecotourism's role in facilitating sustainable development. Many critics have responded that a celebratory tone is inappropriate, given the growing evidence of failed projects, disrupted communities and ecosystems, and greenwashing under the guise of ecotourism, not to mention the processes by which the IYE itself has been organized. Even ecotourism's supporters admit that greenwashing and "ecotourism lite," or superficial attempts to integrate nature or conservationist principles like reusing hotel towels into tourism, have become a red herring for tourism's poor environmental record. Indeed, promoters argue that this in itself justifies the IYE, to establish and reinforce high standards and expose those doing the greenwashing, and they affirm that genuine ecotourism is possible with an inclusive planning process.

Although the actual planning for the IYE has been closely controlled by its organizers, UNEP has publically acknowledged and confronted its critics. But critics continue to be concerned that the IYE still does not confront the structural inequalities that characterize ecotourism's origins and practice. As expressed in a letter from the Third World Network to Hon. Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the U.N., "There are concerns that the event will result in misconceived and inflationary ecotourism or more correctly 'mass nature tourism' policies and programs that inevitably exacerbate problems, such as the degradation of ecosystems, loss of biological and cultural diversity, disruption of local economies, displacement and dispossession, and resistance from community and indigenous peoples and groups." Below I review some of these concerns in more detail, as well as some of UNEP's responses to them.

Whose Interests Does it Serve?

One of the major concerns of critics is that the IYE's partiality toward product development, the review of good practices, and discussions of ecotourism's potentials gives the impression that it is already functioning well. This itself is a premature assessment, when even the World Bank, that has been promoting ecotourism development for at least a decade, has published studies that suggest that few ecotourism projects have actually generated substantial income for the parks they are intended to protect, much less the local people living near them. The IYE's language of potentials and good practices therefore muddies the waters of debates over sustainable development, providing justifications for implementation of ecotourism as a technical element in broader development plans.

Furthermore, as Anita Pleumarom of the Bangkok-based Tourism Investigation and Monitoring Team points out, there is a widespread perception among grassroots groups that the large nature conservation and ecotourism organizations have colluded to lobby for the U.N. endorsement of ecotourism and now want to exploit it for self serving purposes, such as getting free promotion for their products and technical consulting services, or getting funding for their own projects.

For many grassroots groups concerned with challenging not only globalization, but also the central position of international environmental organizations in its political and cultural order, it is deeply troubling that organizations such as TIES, CI, and ETE, which are based in the North, are mandated to represent the concerns of the NGOs and communities in the South that have been aggressively targeted for ecotourism development. Indeed, at the May 2000 meeting of the Convention of Biological Diversity in Nairobi, Kenya, a statement presented by a spectrum of Indigenous Peoples' representatives and NGOs named TIES as one of the large nature conservation and development organizations that has consistently ignored local peoples' concerns in its drive to promote ecotourism. Although the IYE's NGO partners have adopted language of support for indigenous peoples and local communities, their identities tend to be linked with national elites, tourism companies, and government ministries, whose investment interests sometimes diverge radically from local concerns for self-determination, cultural survival, and economic access.

There are other questions here regarding the ability of targeted peoples to just say no to ecotourism development. The language of the IYE emphasizes the inevitability and universality of ecotourism, but critics consistently raise the question: are debt-ridden Southern governments prepared to say no to ecotourism development? The pressures to generate foreign exchange for debt-repayment purposes, as well as the fact that national elites often benefit economically from tourism development, suggest that governments may not be in a strong position to reject ecotourism as a development tool.

This is further compounded by the enthusiastic endorsement and promotion of ecotourism by international lending and bilateral development agencies, like the World Bank, USAID, and so on. But this leads to another question, which is that if governments

do aggressively promote ecotourism, are they equipped or inclined to monitor the impacts? The IYE is meant to generate meaningful dialogue on this topic, but some are left wondering if monitoring programs are an ex post facto response, much less sustainable in an environment of limited resources and little political will or ability to challenge the large development agencies and tourism corporations bent on ecotourism development.

Ecotourism's perceived lack of widespread benefits for local peoples is substantiated in a recent UNCTAD study that shows that despite the efforts of governments to develop suitable policies dealing with tourism, their efforts are often undermined by external forces beyond their control, including financial leakages (outflows of foreign exchange generated by tourism) that reach levels as high as 75%. The UNCTAD study observes, "the predatory practices and anti-competitive behaviour [of a few tourism suppliers based in tourist-generating countries] have two main effects on the economic viability of tourism in developing countries: unbalanced trade benefits, and the deepening of the leakage effect. Their combined impact minimize the positive impacts of spillover and multiplier effects inherent to tourism, and undermine the financial capacity of enterprises and the ability of countries to earmark necessary resources to maintain and upgrade basic infrastructure and quality standards in order to satisfy in an adequate way competitive conditions and international demand."

Of further concern is that one of IYE's organizers, the World Tourism Organization, is the world's major proponent of the liberalization of tourism services, a position that favors multinational tourism corporations (airlines, hotel companies, travel agencies, and so on) with a financial stake in the reduction or elimination of trade barriers and regulations. As these corporations have begun to market ecotourism options, there is concern, especially among small-scale ecotourism operators, that the WTO/OMT's free trade stance undermines not only governments but small operators who cannot compete with multinational corporations.

The claim is often made that ecotourism will lead to a greater distribution of wealth and an increase in standards of living when there is local community involvement. But as Mexican economist David Barkin has argued, even when ecotourism is not run by outsiders, economic benefits for communities can be limited because local elites are often the ones in the best economic and political position to benefit by tourism development. Furthermore, when viewed as a single-factor economic solution, ecotourism projects do not support the broader regeneration of community-based economies and self-sufficiency, which are crucial factors for local sustainability. In fact, Barkin argues, if local needs for income and employment are not met, or continue to be defined elsewhere, ecotourism projects can actually further undermine local economic security, social relations, and ecosystems.

This is being borne out in the post-September 11 drop in tourism bookings, as destination communities experience the bust-side of the tourism boom-bust equation. But it is also the product of the fact that that tourism relies on low-paying and seasonal labor conditions. Local people tend to enter the tourism economy at its lowest level, and soon find out that they cannot live in tourist areas on the minimal wages they are paid.

Furthermore, uneven ecotourism development is reflected directly in ecological degradation. This is the case of the Monarch Butterfly Reserve in Michoacan, Mexico, where, in spite of the presence of a self-declared ecotourism industry and hundreds of thousands of people who come to see the spectacle of butterflies every year, impoverished peasants continue to violate the reserve's ban on logging. This is happening even though peasants are aware of the importance of forest conservation, and precisely because ecotourism development there has not offered any meaningful economic opportunities or self-sufficiency for the majority of people.

What are its Real Objectives?

The IYE's claims to ecotourism's universal role in sustainable development leave some critics wondering what the true intentions of the IYE are. Is it to promote ecotourism projects all over the world? If so, what are the long-term implications of bringing rural communities to compete with each other in international tourism markets, and who takes responsibility for the social, economic, and environmental consequences?

Given that ecotourism is ill-defined, whose definition will count? Is the IYE's main objective to encourage all holiday-makers to become ecotourists? According to the World Tourism Organization, preliminary data for 1999 show that the number of international tourists reached 664 million, an increase of 4.5% over the previous year. That hundreds of millions of tourists would seek the Westernized version of nature promoted in ecotourism - unpeopled wilderness - could be good business for some. But not only is that ideal an absurd reduction of what motivates people to travel; it also represents an ecological and social disaster of tremendous consequences for those rural communities and landscapes targeted by ecotourists.

Critics are concerned that the IYE is too oriented toward the tourism industry's interests in marketing and promotion. The Third World Network, a worldwide coalition of indigenous peoples groups, environmentalists, academics, and human rights groups, has proposed to rename the IYE as the International Year of Reviewing Ecotourism and redefine events to promote greater and more pluralistic opportunities for critical reflection and review, not product development. Their international informational and political organizing campaign ("Clearinghouse for Reviewing Ecotourism") has succeeded in gaining the U.N.'s attention, to some extent. But the response of UNEP, an assertion that only the General Assembly can change the IYE's name and a half-hearted introduction of the language of reviewing into its descriptions and publications, reveals that organizers either will not or cannot fully set aside the IYE's promotional aspects in favor of a more disinterested position.

Ecotourism-as-Development: Ecological and Consumer Connections Reflecting the development establishment that has adopted and helped shape it, ecotourism discourse emphasizes the eradication of poverty in the global South. At the same time, however, it also provides an experimental laboratory and self-serving target of investment for the development, NGO, and corporate interests driving the aid agenda. This is a familiar scheme, as Pleumarom points out: ecotourism “is increasingly introduced in Third World countries in form of a development package, involving capital, expertise, technology and management systems, and is, thus, becoming something like a new Green Revolution.”

Like other development packages, ecotourism carries with it experts, technical knowledge systems, and cookbook approaches. This is evident in the promise by organizers that during the IYE they will be distributing “ecotourism information kits” to communities and businesses interested in developing ecotourism. If communities need anything relating to ecotourism, it is certainly more information so they can make informed decisions and commitments. But according to Deborah McLaren, who directs the Rethinking Tourism Project, such kits often promote a reductionistic approach that affirms the universal and technical, not socially-specific, nature of ecotourism development. They also promote the homogenization of tourism experiences, as opposed to encouraging communities to engage actively with tourists on their own terms and in ways that bring both tourists and locals to new understandings of human-nature interactions, cultural differences, and so on.

The discourse of ecotourism promises the greater productivity of nature without its overexploitation. But just as the Green Revolution initially led to high yields, and soon gave way in many places to darker stories of soil degradation, loss of indigenous plant species and knowledge, and dependence on monocrops, so the picture of ecotourism’s environmental record is revealing a darker side.

Part of this picture is ecotourism’s intensive exploitation of petroleum-based energy and its use of often limited local resources. Ecotourism rarely, if ever, calls into question the consumption-oriented lifestyles that motivate ecotourists to travel in the first place. Dubbed ‘ego-tourism’ by Ian Munt, ecotourism is as much about confirming one’s class identity, educational sophistication, disposable income, and cultural capital as it is about visiting nature in far away places. This goes hand-in-hand with the common assumption that people from Northern (industrial) tourist-generating societies are free with the inherent right to travel wherever they chose. Ecotourists, no different from other tourists, consume non-renewable resources to arrive at their destinations; perhaps even more since the areas they target are often the most remote and pristine. Yet the linkage between jetting half way around the world, the contribution of jet travel to greenhouse gas concentrations, and the ecotourist experience are rarely made.

Once at their pristine destinations, ecotourists often barely understand the ecological consequences of their visits. While they may be told to step carefully lest they contribute to soil erosion, ecotourists rarely acknowledge how the meals they eat, the toilets they flush, the water they drink, and so on, are all part of broader regional economic and ecological systems they are helping to reconfigure with their very activities. As the

International Forum on Indigenous Tourism argues, “It is brash to assert that more middle class consumerism will solve the problems of the world...Ecotourists may believe that they ‘take only pictures and leave only footprints,’ but they also leave copious trash and sanitation problems while using precious local resources. If these consumers notice the degradation they provoke they assume it is the result of local ignorance, and not their own practices, complicity, or numbers.”

Ecotourism development itself has been directly implicated in ecological degradation, often because the drive for profit exceeds the concern for ecosystems. An ongoing controversy in Thailand illustrates how the pressures to develop ecotourism infrastructure can contribute to landscape modification and even the violation of national laws intended to protect ecosystems. As reported in the Bangkok Post and Bangkok’s The Nation, in 1998 the Tourism Authority of Thailand was set to coordinate the implementation of tourism projects worth \$75 million, initiated and funded by the World Bank’s Social Investment Project and the Japanese Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund. The result, according to The Nation, is that “Major construction projects some involving logging operations are being undertaken at full steam in national parks countrywide under the pretense of ecotourism.”

Further, the Tourism Authority of Thailand, along with the Royal Forestry Department, has been using Bt600 million in loans from the Bank’s Social Investment Project to build tourist facilities in nineteen protected areas. Bank officials have denied their role in overseeing the projects, and contended that the logging is small scale and only to make room for tourist amenities. But as critics have been quick to point out, Thailand’s environmental legislation prohibits the felling of trees or landscape alteration in national parks, and the World Bank’s timeline for the use of funds (two years) forces development that is too rapid. As a result of this situation, environmental groups and tourism monitoring groups in Thailand are especially worried about another \$150 million program recently launched in Thailand by the World Bank, the Global Environmental Facility, and Conservation International, that is also expected to promote ecotourism development.

Indigenous Peoples and the International Forum on Indigenous Tourism According to Oliver Hillel, UNEP’s coordinator for IYE, “Few countries and institutions are open to participation with indigenous communities. But we are aware of that need, that concern.” That the U.N.’s IYE process is aware of, but has not privileged, the concerns of indigenous peoples is not surprising; the U.N. is, after all, a body of nation-states.

Pierre van den Berghe’s insight about modern states is particularly instructive here: the claims of pluralist nations internal to states, such as those of indigenous peoples, often represent a challenge to the legitimacy and hegemony of modern states and the elites who run them. The dilemma for the IYE is obvious: how to take into consideration indigenous concerns without alienating the various powerful governments and capitalist interests also involved in IYE. In the context of struggles over ecotourism and development policy, indigenous peoples find that their interests in cultural survival, control over land use and resource management, intellectual property rights, and political self-determination can

conflict profoundly with the national and international organizations promoting ecotourism.

For many indigenous communities, ecotourism has been presented as a method of development that helps preserve both landscapes and traditional lifeways, and many communities have expressed interest in and a commitment to developing ecotourism. Indeed, ecotourism commonly takes place anyway in the pristine areas where indigenous peoples live: on lands once considered peripheral, as well as lands that have been set aside for biospheres, parks, and protected areas. When these lands are targeted by tourism, however, conditions can quickly undermine indigenous peoples' land claims and control over what and who goes in and comes out of these landscapes. As a Maasai ecotourism critic observes, "The designation of ecotourism sites tends to disentitle the poor by depriving them of their traditional use of land and natural resources."

In some cases, indigenous communities have found ecotourism projects to provide successful avenues of revenue generation. But for others, ecotourism projects have backfired, causing divisions or not generating the income they expected. Or they have realized that like other forms of tourism, ecotourism relies on simplistic stereotypes in which ethnic groups provide an "exotic" backdrop to natural scenery and wildlife.

In still other cases, ecotourism directly contradicts the fundamental values of the group. Roy Taylor of the North American Indigenous Peoples Biodiversity Project points out that "the way that conservation is practiced in the West is viewed as conservation-for-development and that is not necessarily consistent with our traditional view of guardianship and protection. We wouldn't even use the word conservation."

Therefore, questions about ecotourism's technical aspects for example, how to deal with over-visitation, how to ensure that soils are not eroded or wildlife disturbed, how to plan infrastructure, and so on may be important, but they do not address fundamental concerns about ecotourism's role in the cultural and political domination of indigenous peoples through development, or that fully informed consent about ecotourism must be based on respect for the sovereignty and rights of each community. That is why the IYE's language of stakeholder inclusion and cooperation that genuine ecotourism is possible if the planning process includes all stakeholders tends to be unrealistic and simplistic, because it ignores or downplays the fundamentally divergent values and interests between promoters and targets of ecotourism.

Of particular concern to some indigenous critics is that ecotourism brings new pressures to convert nature into exploitable resources, through the conversion of sacred sites into tourist attractions or resources for bioprospecting. In the now well-known example in the Loita Hills of Kenya, Maasai have been pressured to convert the Naimina-Enkiyio forest into an ecotourism attraction. Having experienced the devastating effects of tourism at nearby Masai Mara National Park, they are determined to preserve this sacred forest of high biodiversity that for generations has been kept as a place of worship.

Additionally, indigenous communities have begun to discover that bioprospectors have also targeted their lands and knowledge as productive resources for capitalist exploitation. Posing as ecotourists interested in traditional knowledge of plants for medicinal purposes, for example, bioprospectors have sought to sidestep local regulations and laws. Without adequate legal protections on intellectual property, indigenous groups are rightfully reluctant to share traditional cultural knowledge.

In light of these concerns, several indigenous organizations have come together to establish the International Forum on Indigenous Tourism, an Americas-based coalition of indigenous groups and communities dealing with ecotourism. Not long after the declaration of the IYE, U.S.-based Rethinking Tourism Project (RTP) and Cuernavaca, Mexico-based Centro Internacional para la Cultura y Enseñanza de la Lengua (CICE), agreed that the IYE's language of celebration masked deeper structural inequalities in the abilities of indigenous communities to make informed decisions about ecotourism development. They began discussing possible responses to the IYE, and soon found that Oaxaca, Mexico-based Instituto de la Naturaleza y Sociedad de Oaxaca (INSO) had similar concerns regarding the rise of ecotourism in the state of Oaxaca.

Together, the groups decided that Oaxaca, with its reputation for vigorous indigenous political and cultural activism, represented a useful place to convene representatives of indigenous and popular groups to reflect on the opportunities and dilemmas of ecotourism. Mexican scholar Victor Toledo has recently written of "el otro Zapatismo" (the other Zapatismo) evident throughout rural Mexico, especially in Oaxaca. This refers to self-consciously "post-development" forms of organizing based on the non-hierarchical political participation of indigenous peoples on regional and state levels. This form of political participation, organized around the expression of traditional cultural values, the maintenance of community structure, and collective control over resources, is challenging received meanings of citizenship, nature, governance, and civil society.

An example of this is the 1998 passage in Oaxaca of the Ley de Usos y Costumbres (Law of Traditions and Customs, or 'The Indigenous Law') that reforms the state constitution to recognize for the first time the legal authority of traditional indigenous social structures and juridical systems. The law contributes to the political autonomy of indigenous peoples and implies profound changes in the system of governance in Oaxaca towards greater cultural and juridical pluralism. With Oaxaca's growing reputation as an ecotourism destination (it is the most biodiverse of Mexico's states), indigenous communities find themselves increasingly concerned with finding ways to have tourism support their efforts to increase cultural and political self-determination.

Rejecting the tendency of international initiatives on ecotourism to focus simply on product development or good and bad practices, thereby avoiding deeper discussions of the cultural and structural conditions under which ecotourism operates, the partners regard their initiative as a space in which to evaluate indigenous experiences with ecotourism outside the self-promotional venue of the IYE. The initiative includes a several day long encounter to be held in Oaxaca during March 2002, as well as the establishment and reinforcement of a network of indigenous communities and activists

committed to sharing perspectives and information on tourism development.

As many as sixty communities throughout Mexico have committed to send representatives to the forum and are currently participating in the formation of the network, which also includes U.S. and Canadian indigenous groups. This is not conceived as a top-down passage of information, from expert to laypeople: outside of a shared critique of the IYE's uncritical foundation in a universalizing developmentalist agenda, the participants emphasize that the character and methodology of their Forum is not pre-given and that the broad category of Indigenous Tourism reflects and encompasses the inherently pluralistic, specific, and non-deterministic forms of tourism that many indigenous communities around the world are advocating.

The participants therefore regard their growing relationships as a convivial space of intercultural dialogue and encounter, proceeding along a mutually-constructed agenda that rejects the reduction of human experiences and development along a single line or within a single system. This interculturalism and pluralism offers a profound political challenge to the globalist aspirations of ecotourism's and IYE's promoters and brings to the forefront questions of cultural and community survival in their deepest senses.

By forging new partnerships, both within nations and across national boundaries, the Forum is already raising important questions and issues marginalized in most international discussions of ecotourism. For example, some groups involved in the Forum have pointed out that their involvement in tourism is not based on the manufacture of attractions simply to please tourist sensibilities, but serves as a vehicle through which to collectively reflect on the very specific relationship between their culture and the lands they have inherited. In this sense, tourism itself provides the grounds for intercultural exchange and dialogue.

Others have insisted that tourism must be integrated into and not displace other subsistence activities and land use plans, such as community forestry, agriculture, non-timber forest products, fishing, and so on. When balanced and integrated with other activities, tourism does not become a monocrop upon which a whole community's economic livelihood depends. This not only protects a community from the fickle and inconsistent marketplace of international tourism, but means that no single ecological and social niche gets overexploited.

Furthermore, it is widely accepted within the Forum that success in tourism is defined not simply in economic terms. More importantly, tourism is an activity that must reflect and strengthen the social life of the community. For example, decisions about how and where to develop tourism are made through collective decision-making and community assembly. Tourists are welcomed with hospitality and a spirit of sharing, but certain spaces, activities and knowledge remain protected for the privacy of the community: decisions are made collectively about what is off-limits to touristic movement, and intellectual property rights are conserved in the face of biopiracy.

Ecotourism in an Age of Uncertainty

After the events of September 11, the globalizers' delusions of an inevitable and universal Western modernity are under threat of collapse. With the drop in international tourism that has resulted from these events, ecotourism's promoters have, as expected, urgently reiterated their mission to bring development to those real and imagined hotbeds of potential anti-Western sentiment, cynically repeating concerns that it is the poor who are truly suffering the drop in tourism.

What is worse, they will argue, is that nature's survival is at stake since without ecotourism's revenues people in the South apparently have no alternative to destroying it. We can surely expect that the IYE will now, more than ever, use its global pulpit to argue for ecotourism's central role if not inevitability in combatting poverty and nature's demise, and its positive role in creating world peace and understanding.

However, to do so would miss the true lessons of the globalist era, lessons that are reflected in the International Forum on Indigenous Tourism. The attempt to force people everywhere into the same cultural, economic, and political mold (which itself harbors deep contradictions) is bound to generate insecurity, resentment, conflict, and even ecological degradation. The task is how to forge conviviality and coexistence among peoples with profoundly divergent histories, beliefs, and values.

The International Forum on Indigenous Tourism attempts to do this by acknowledging at the outset the strength in pluralism and self-determination, not by rejecting tourism and tourists, but by rejecting the monistic logic and political-economic structures underlying ecotourism's developmentalist fantasies and tragedies. By facilitating the emergence of horizontally-aligned solidarities, it strengthens an alternative vision of public engagement, nature conservation, and tourism beyond the IYE's universalistic and self-serving vision.

This paper was first presented at the University of Vermont Environmental Symposium in October 2001. A shorter version of it appears in the current issue of *The Ecologist* (Vol. 32, No. 2, March 2002), website: www.theecologist.org.

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Community and Indigenous Representatives Reject Unfair Process of IYE Southeast Asia Conference By Tourism Investigation & Monitoring Team

From Tourism Investigation & Monitoring Team
as part of the Clearinghouse for Reviewing Ecotourism

On the fifth and last day of the Regional Conference on "Community-based Ecotourism (CBET) in Southeast Asia", held in Chiang Mai, Thailand from 3 to 7 March, the event took an unexpected turn when participants representing community and Indigenous Peoples organizations from several Asian countries presented a Statement that denounced the unfair and pre-scribed process of the meeting. They strongly criticized the lack of opportunities for community people to participate in the meeting and the neglect of their concerns, even though the term "community-based" was included in the conference title.

The conference was part of a series of regional preparatory meetings for the World Ecotourism Summit - the main event of the International Year of Ecotourism (IYE) - in Quebec, Canada, initiated and co-sponsored by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) and UNEP. It was hosted by three Thai organizations: The Bangkok-based Responsible Ecological Social Tours Project (REST); the Bangkok-based Regional Community Forestry Training Center (RECOFTC) that in cooperation with the Nepal-based Mountain Institute offers training courses on community-based ecotourism; and the Project for Recovery of Life and Culture (PRLC) that is based in Mae Hong Son province, northwestern Thailand.

Other sponsors of the meeting were the Heinrich Boell Foundation (Germany), conservation International (USA), the Rain Forest Alliance (USA), the Canadian Embassy's Canada Fund (Bangkok, Thailand), as well as two Thai government agencies, namely the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and the Department of Environmental Quality Promotion.

The morning session of the last conference day (7 March) started with a key note speech by Ms Juline Dulnuan, an Indigenous researcher at the University of the Philippines' Asian Institute of Tourism, who gave a realistic picture on the impacts of tourism on Indigenous communities in Banaue, Ifugao - a World Heritage Site famous for its magnificent rice terraces.

This was followed by a panel discussion on "Monitoring Costs and Benefits and Impact Assessment of Ecotourism". Anita Pleumarom of the Bangkok-based Tourism Investigation and Monitoring Team (tim-team), who was one of the panelists, called for a broad-based and sincere reviewing and monitoring process. Among other things, she highlighted the issues of globalization and corporatization associated with ecotourism, which have led to increasing disempowerment and dispossession of rural and Indigenous communities despite the altruistic language of "local participation".

Several participants said in private that this was the first time that some space was given to express different views during the conference. All earlier sessions had overly focussed on planning and management of projects as well as on business affairs such as the

packaging and marketing of ecotourism products. Community perspectives should have been at the center of the discussions from the very beginning and not only brought up at the end, when the Farewell Party was over, a number of participants had already left, and the conference was about to close.

However, the course and poor outcome of the conference was predictable. The outreach to attract participants was already questionable as the invitation letter was addressed to "Friends in Community-Based Ecotourism" (signed by conference-coordinator Nicole Haeusler, a former marketing consultant to REST). The programme also indicated that - as so often experienced before - the ecotourism lobbyists, many of them Western "experts", would take the lead in the conference discussions.

In addition, the local organizers, who held a Pre-conference meeting with 45 Thai community representatives last January to select delegates for the Chiang Mai conference, made clear that only candidates who had been actively involved in the CBET business for at least two years were welcome as participants and had a chance to attend the Chiang Mai event.

All that shows that the conference did not really cater to a wider spectrum of local people, grassroots-organizations, researchers and monitoring groups concerned with the (eco)tourism-related issues. Organizations and individuals, who are known to the local organizers for holding independent and critical views on tourism development, were not approached to share their knowledge and expertise. Nor did the organizers invite any of the coordinating groups of the campaign for an International Year of REVIEWING Ecotourism (IYRE), which are based in Southeast Asia. Tim-team eventually decided to put forward a request to speak at the conference, after the tourism programme coordinator of UNEP, Oliver Hillel, and Director of the Thailand and South-East Asia Regional Office of the Heinrich Boell Foundation (HBF), Heike Loeschmann, had signaled to the IYRE campaign groups that they would appreciate their input to the conference.

Efforts to steer the conference towards a more just and democratic approach were made in advance. For instance, an Indigenous rights advocate had pointed out to the organizers that it was not appropriate to have an ecotourism event like this without adequate participation of Indigenous Peoples. In addition, tim-team sent a letter to HBF that was as a co-sponsor of the conference, raising concern that the meeting was just too expensive for financially weak community representatives and local NGOs to attend (e.g. the venue was a luxury resort in the hills outside of Chiang Mai, where Thai Cabinet and other high-profile meetings have been held.)

As seen in relation to other IYE-related meetings, however, the money issue was again put at the forefront to justify the under-representation of communities and Indigenous Peoples. In her key note address to the Chiang Mai Conference, Heike Loeschmann of HBF expressed "great appreciation" for the organizers' efforts to raise enough funding and said they "have not been able to raise the necessary funds to offer at least 30-50% of the participants' full financial support for participation in both conference and exposure trip"- unfortunately. But she also asked, "What is the higher meaning of promoting

'ecotourism' by declaring the year 2002 to be the Year of Ecotourism if not broad based consultation with local right-holders?!"

Whatever conference report will be presented to the World Ecotourism Summit, it can be regarded as incomplete or even invalid because local communities and Indigenous Peoples' perspectives were not properly consulted during the conference and other critical facts and views from the region were sidelined.

The international and local conference organizers and sponsors are called to take care that at least the full text of the Statement of participants representing community people (see below) will be included in the report for the Quebec Summit. In addition, independent civil society organizations must look for other channels to ensure that grassroots voices from the region will be heard at the macro-level.

Finally, it should be noted that in the same week, a three-day workshop was organized by the Tourism Authority of Thailand in Bangkok to fine-tune Thailand's ecotourism strategies and to also prepare a report for the World Ecotourism Summit in Canada. The plans put forward at that meeting suggest that decision-makers in tourism want to use the UN-initiated IYE to turn the country into a big Disney-style "eco"-themepark. For instance, proposed projects for national parks include night safaris that "would be like a huge theatre with wild animals", golf courses, spa complexes and other extravagant attractions. There is little doubt that these are the policies and projects that actually matter, while the talks about "community-based" or "sustainable ecotourism" remain only so many words and deflect from the real issues.

This article can be found at <http://www.twinside.org.sg/title/iye.htm>
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Scaling the eco-tourism ladder in Ratanakkiri

Phnom Penh Post article, February 15-28, 2002

By Sophie Wilson and Rachel Scollay

Four days into a recent trek in Cambodia's north-east province of Ratanakkiri, two tourists arrived at a village untouched by Western influence. The women there were topless and chugged on wood pipes, the houses were made of bamboo, and the children ran warily from the tall, white barangs.

It was undoubtedly unusual and impressive. It was also frustrating, the tourists said, as their guide couldn't tell them how to give money to the community. They had no way of finding out about the people or of knowing whether their presence was an intrusion. They came, they looked, and they left.

Forty kilometers away Chery, a young English-speaking guide from the minority Tampoeun tribe, takes another two tourists around Yeak Loam lake, near the provincial capital of Ban Lung. At a cultural center set up by the community, Chery plays an assortment of traditional instruments and talks about his culture.

The next stop is a community farm where the tourists talk to a Tampoeun family about agricultural traditions before going to the village. At the end of the day the guide is paid and a slice of the money is given to the community.

In both cases there is an aspect of the human zoo, where relatively well-off tourists ooh and aah over the indigenous cultures. Where the difference exists is that in the second, the community itself manages the venture, makes the rules and receives a slice of the earnings.

The result is that the residents of Yeak Loam commune will benefit more from a well-managed scheme than those in the first village. The community has a 25 year management lease over the protected Yeak Loam Lake.

Graeme Brown, an Australian volunteer working on rural development projects in Ratanakkiri, is trying to help the commune manage the dangers and take advantage of the opportunities tourism brings.

"There is going to be a commodification of the culture," he says, "but it has to be managed, and it has to be managed by those communities, not by outsiders who aren't interested in the culture ahead of their interest in money."

Some tour groups operating out of Phnom Penh, says Brown, run their tours in such a way that the local people simply don't benefit.

"Then there are tourists who are basically unaware of their impact," he says. "They come here and want to see the culture and the environment but they are unaware that when they do so, they pour most of the money into people who are not serving those interests."

Brown says that, in the main, indigenous people do not reap the benefits of tourism, yet the income could be a lifeline as they continue to lose their farming land.

"You can look at tourism as serving tourists or you can look at tourism as serving the community," he says. "The latter is what we would like to see here."

The governor of Ratanakkiri, Kham Khoeun, says the influence of international and local tourists is good for his province as it is pushing development efforts.

"But we also have to strengthen the culture and the environment to withstand the impacts of tourism," he says.

Yeak Loam's commune chief, Bai Keng, says people in the commune generally like the scheme, although he is aware that tourism is "sometimes a problem". They have used the money to buy salt, sugar and ink for the community and to build a meeting house in one of the commune's five villages. He sees further value in his people teaching Tampoeun culture to foreigners.

Speaking English is the "ticket" to making money out of tourism, Brown says. The DRIVE project (Developing Remote Indigenous Village Education), which is financed by the Australian Embassy, helps indigenous people to learn English. That gives them access to tourism and the opportunity to tell people about their culture.

One problem is that money is a relatively new concept for the indigenous people, who traditionally use barter. Brown warns that if it comes in "inappropriately" it could destroy the culture.

"Tourism has got the potential of pouring money into [the pockets of] a small number of people," he says. "That disrupts communities and destroys solidarity."

He says that if money is distributed in traditional ways there is a chance it will be spread out.

"The trick is to do that in a way that allows many to have money," he says. Brown is concerned that a sudden influx of tourists and cash could arrive before the necessary structures are in place.

"The problem is that the national level wants money quickly and people here want money quickly. But you've got to build structures to manage money and that takes time.

"I honestly don't think people know what is coming with tourism," he continues. "It's not something people have experienced before. I can read articles and watch videos about what [tourism's] impacts have been, but people here don't have access to that information. But they also haven't had access to the information to show how you can manage it - how you can turn it into opportunities."

Neourk, a young DRIVE student, says he regrets that he has not learned to play traditional instruments. He worries that his people no longer have time for their own culture.

"Bringing tourists here makes us learn about our culture again," he says.

Brown says that is a potentially valuable benefit of tourism.

"There are lots of messages telling people that the old ways are dead, but this changes that way of thinking. Their culture could be their future."

As the small cogs of provincial development turn in Ratanakkiri, bigger ones are cranking up at the national level. The draft Master Plan for Tourism Development in Ratanakkiri and Mondolkiri, prepared by a Thai research body, states: "Eco-tourism will put Ratanakkiri and Mondolkiri on the world eco-tourism map. At the same time it could earn foreign exchange for Cambodia."

The report identifies a "first phase" for 2001-2005 which will focus on the "eastern highlands' natural beauty and culture," and includes the participation of local people.

As infrastructure is built and tourist numbers climb, it discusses the "future development" of hotels, souvenir shops, sporting equipment supplies and car rental.

The master plan envisions Ratanakkiri as a link on the "tourism triangle" between Thailand, Laos and Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam. It identifies the provincial capital Ban Lung as a future "major tourism center city".

By 2006 it projects more than 16,000 people will visit Ratanakkiri each year, and suggests that number could climb as high as 43,000 by 2011.

Under-secretary of state at the Ministry of Tourism, Sisowath Chivannariddh, says the ministry is well aware of the need for sensitivity in developing eco-tourism in Ratanakkiri.

"If you do it in the wrong way it can destroy the very fabric you are trying to preserve," says Chivannariddh. "We have to be very careful in developing [the area] because it is very fragile."

The national eco-tourism plan for Ratanakkiri is reliant on private investment, but he says it is unclear how the investment will be managed in order to preserve the province's resources. He says laws and regulations will eventually be drawn up when the infrastructure has been developed.

Concerns that eco-tourism is a meaningless phrase are given some weight by the draft report. In Bar Keo, a village 15 kilometers from Ban Lung, eco-tourism could focus on participatory gem harvesting, the report states. Rather than taking nothing but photos and leaving nothing but footprints, tourists might be given the opportunity to take a fist-full of gems and leave a large hole in the ground.

In a recent report, Anita Pleumarom from Thailand's Tourism Investigation and Monitoring Team (TIMT) warns of an "eco-facade".

"Many of the claims concerning the benefits of eco-tourism have been exaggerated, or owe more to labeling and marketing, as such plans are often planned and carried out without local consent and support, and indeed threaten rather than benefit local people's cultures, their subsistence economies and life-sustaining natural resource base."

In Thailand, she writes, "eco-facades" have already made their mark, "provoking protests from indigenous Karen people who say their traditional livelihoods, culture and environment [are] threatened."

Cambodia's Minister of Tourism, Veng Seryvuth, is aware of the problems caused in other countries by eco-tourism schemes and has every intention of avoiding them.

"Because of the war we have started tourism later than other countries. We must use this to our advantage by avoiding their mistakes," he says. "If you destroy the environment everyone will lose out."

What the critics say

The UN has christened 2002 the International Year of Eco-Tourism (YET). Countries throughout the world are touting their unspoiled cultures and pristine environments as an oasis for travelers on the lookout for something new.

Get away from the rat race; see a real-life ethnic minority in a real-life indigenous village; walk on earth unsullied by concrete; and reach deep into your pocket for this once in a lifetime experience. Critics of YET suggest visitors take a photo, because today's virginal destination could be tomorrow's tourist hotbed.

In a letter to UN secretary-general Kofi Annan, members of the Third World Network, a group of individuals and NGOs concerned with development issues, called for the year to be renamed the International Year of Reviewing Eco-tourism.

They say that overuse of the term has rendered it hollow and often a justification for development. That brings with it a threat to environments, economies and indigenous populations all over the globe, particularly in developing nations.

A conference on eco-tourism in the Thai city of Chiang Mai in late February will discuss the good and the bad points of eco-tourism ventures. The conference, which is motivated by the YET and organized by local groups working with indigenous peoples, is part of a worldwide network of meetings aimed at finding a new definition for the term "eco-tourism".

In reality the term "eco-tourism" can mean many things, from the "eco" activities of clambering up mountain peaks, to climbing the wooden stairs of minority tribespeople's houses in Ratanakkiri to peer inside.

Then there is the problem of rationalizing the concept of "eco" and the methods required to have an eco-holiday. Graeme Brown in Ratanakkiri says eco-tourism is a "complete and utter contradiction in terms - you can't get in an airplane and drive around in a car for your own pleasure and call it supporting the environment. But given that it is happening, there are better ways of doing it."

This article can be found on the t.i.m.-team website as a part of the Clearinghouse for REVIEWING ecotourism at <http://www.twinside.org.sg/title/iye.htm>

Why Tourism Concern is cautious about the International Year of Ecotourism

Release date: 25 January 2002

Summary

2002 has been declared as the International Year of Ecotourism (IYE) by the United Nations.

The year is being launched in New York on 28 January by the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

The IYE will include a range of activities, including a World Ecotourism Summit from 19-22 May 2002 in Quebec, Canada.

The IYE has been met with enthusiasm by many tourist boards and tour operators but with scepticism by many non-governmental organisations, particularly those in the South (Third World countries).

Tourism Concern is pleased that the IYE has raised awareness of the complex debate about how to make tourism more sustainable. However, Tourism Concern is concerned that a sudden growth in 'ecotourism' may not necessarily work in the interests of both local and indigenous people in Southern destinations.

Tourism Concern supports sustainable and responsible tourism. However we point out that the problems of unsustainable tourism development cannot be solved by promoting 'ecotourism', which is a small, niche market and also, by its nature, necessitates developing tourism in fragile, sensitive areas. This could be fraught with difficulties if demand for ecotourism increases significantly.

"Tourism Concern is pleased that campaigning organisations in destination countries have pressurised the IYE to recognise that even ecotourism can have serious negative impacts on local people and environments and needs careful consideration," says Patricia Barnett, director of Tourism Concern. "All tourism needs to benefit local people and their environments, including 'ecotourism'."

What is ecotourism?

Ecotourism is a commonly used term internationally denoting 'nature tourism'. The term is used largely by the American public and tourism industry and less frequently by British tour operators.

The market for nature holidays has always been an important niche market in the tourism industry. Typical 'ecotourism' holidays include walking holidays, bird watching holidays, mountain trekking, rainforest trekking and safaris.

Ecotourism can be part of a more conventional holiday (day trips to areas of outstanding natural beauty) or can be a total holiday package where the tourist stays in a remote, rural environment for the duration of the holiday.

Ecotourism is a niche market: the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) estimates that ecotourism represents between 2-4% of all international travel expenditure (the same size as the so-called MICE segment – Meetings, Incentive, Congresses and Exhibitions).

Ecotourism is presently seen as one of the most lucrative niche markets in the tourism industry as ecotourists are higher spenders than 'ordinary' mass tourists. High spending, nature-loving, responsible tourists are undoubtedly an attractive option for governments looking for ways of earning foreign exchange.

Ecotourism is often seen by poor communities as one of the few livelihoods they have open to them. Communities whose people are living in poverty invariably find their young people migrate to urban centres because of the decline in traditional industries such as agriculture and fishing. Tourism (often 'ecotourism' if they are in remote areas) can prevent this urban drift and provide an essential alternative income.

Ecotourism, if managed properly, could also be an important means of protecting the world's rapidly disappearing ecosystems. If a natural area can be seen to have a high financial worth as an ecotourism destination than alternative more damaging developments, ecologically important areas may be protected from deforestation, agricultural or housing development.

Ecotourism is not however, necessarily 'sustainable tourism' (see below). Sustainable tourism is defined as: 'tourism development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. This means taking into account social and local economic factors, as well as environmental management issues.

"Tourism Concern is pleased that campaigning organisations in destination countries have pressurised the IYE to recognise that even ecotourism can have serious negative impacts on local people and environments and needs careful consideration," says Patricia Barnett, director of Tourism Concern. "All tourism needs to benefit local people and their environments, including 'ecotourism'."

Tourism Concern's position on ecotourism

"While Tourism Concern is pleased that the impacts of tourism are being addressed by the international community through the International Year of Ecotourism, we feel that ecotourism is such a small part of the tourism industry it will not make a significant difference to the sustainability of the overall industry," Patricia Barnett says.

Tourism Concern has always pointed out that just because something is marketed as 'ecotourism', doesn't mean necessarily mean that it supports long-term protection of the

environment. This is true even in countries which are well-known as ecotourism destinations like Belize or Costa Rica.

"Belize, for instance, is one of the world's best-known ecotourism capitals. However, it is something of a victim of its own success," says Patricia Barnett. "It now has a highly competitive tourism industry more interested in marketing a product than ensuring that it is environmentally sound, or that the people are benefiting from it. Local people are marginalised as outsiders buy up the land. Locals are angry that they can no longer access their own forests, which have been their natural home for generations and their islands are sold out to American ecotourism developers."

Greenwashing

Tourism Concern also notes that as ecotourism is undefined, it fall prey to 'greenwash' marketing:

"Ecotourism can be whatever anyone wants. There is no internationally accepted definition of ecotourism and there is no certification system to abide by, or international monitoring body."

It also does not necessarily denote sustainability:

"The term can be used by anyone at anytime for anything from a small-scale locally-run rainforest lodge where the money goes to support a local community, to a large, luxury, foreign-owned resort which has little community involvement and uses masses of natural resources," says Patricia Barnett.

Tourism's voracious appetite for basic resources - land, water and energy - has meant that the tourism industry and governments are increasingly finding themselves opposed over land rights and water rights by local people.

Ecotourists may even visit areas of national beauty and wildlife significance without realising that local people have been evicted from the area in order for ecotourism to be developed, as has happened in East Africa, India, Southern Africa and many other destinations.

Problems with ecotourism: some examples

- **Bolivia – environment:** According to tour operators some self-described 'ecological hotels' around Lake Titicaca dump untreated wastewater into the lake. In the tropical Chapare region near Cochabamba, an immense area of jungle has been cleared to build a golf course for a five-star 'ecological hotel'. Bolivia, in fact, has no environmental standards for hotels (like many countries) and 'ecohotel' is a self-imposed title.

(Source: Latin American Press)

- **Botswana - people:** the remaining few hundred Bushmen of the Central Kalahari are currently being forced off the land they have lived on for centuries by having their water supplies cut off. Intimidation and torture by wildlife officials has occurred. The Botswanan government has stated that (eco) tourists will not want to see 'primitive' people and the Bushmen lifestyle is not compatible with a developing country like Botswana. Most of the Bushmen are now living in desolate camps outside the parks, reliant on food aid.

(Source: Survival)

- **China - wildlife:** Research on tourism's impact in Wolong Nature Reserve in Southwest China revealed that panda habitat was more rapidly destroyed than in areas not protected. Human population increased by 70% since the park was established to cater for the increased number of ecotourists. The number of pandas consequently dropped from 145 to 72 in 12 years.

(Source: Scientist magazine)

- **East Africa – people:** Maasai and Samburu people in East Africa have been evicted from their lands in order for conservation and safari tourism to be developed.

(Source: various, Tourism Concern).

- **Thailand – environment, people:** In April, 2000, 100 angry villagers in Khao Sok national park in Surat Thani province, seized a bulldozer owned by the Royal Forestry Department and trunks of trees they had felled for construction of a 1000 sq. m parking lot, a 800m-long road, 10 toilets and concrete stairs leading to a pier in the park. Campaigners point out that villagers get arrested if they collect mushrooms in the forest, or corals in marine parks, yet various World Bank-funded projects are allowed to fell trees and make landscape alterations without prosecution, despite it being against national law.

(Source: Tim-Team)

Tourism Concern also feels that the question of how to manage a rapid increase in demand for ecotourism must be addressed by the organisers of the IYE in order that environments and communities will benefit from the promotional year and not be overcome or marginalised by it.

Finally, the concept of environmentally-sensitive tourism cannot be fully addressed without dealing with the environmental impact of air travel. Air travel is one of the main causes of global warming.

"If tourists have to travel on several plane journeys in order to reach a remote ecotourism destination, can it be really be labelled as ecotourism?" says Patricia Barnett.

Is the tourism industry taking environmental issues seriously?

Tourism Concern is very pleased that British tour operators and the British government have recently come together with British NGOs to develop a 'Sustainable Tourism Initiative'. This is a strategy for the entire tourism industry, not just those involved in ecotourism.

However, the commitment of the tourism industry to tackle these complex issues still seems to be limited.

"The mass tourism operators have learnt the language of sustainable tourism," says Patricia Barnett. "But little has really changed."

Proof of this has been seen over the last two years in relation to the tourism industry's response to the Balearic islands' decision to implement an eco-tax of 62p per visitor per day.

The ecotax has been decided on in order to raise funds to correct the serious environmental damage done to the Balearics by the tourism boom of the last three decades and to protect fragile areas that are left.

The international tourism industry, including ABTA, have lobbied fiercely against it, saying that it would damage business. This flies in the face of ABTA's own research, which revealed that 64% of people indicated they were prepared to pay an extra £10 to £25 for their holiday if it went towards environmental or social improvements.

"If the tourism industry are going to lobby against a small ecotax in a developed country, then we are not convinced that they are really committed to changing policies in support of the Year of Ecotourism. When it comes down to it, the tourism industry isn't willing to take the risk because it is so competitive and operates on such small profit margins," says Barnett.

A way forward

If ecotourism is to work, it needs to provide not only good conservation measures, but meaningful community participation too.

Tourism Concern has established an International Fair Trade in Tourism Network, which brings together tourism operators, NGOs working in tourism and communities in destination areas, to exchange views and information on socially and environmentally-sound tourism. By using the concept of 'fair trade', which has been so successful with other 'products' such as tea, coffee, bananas and crafts, we are attempting to find a way to make the tourism 'product' more fairly traded.

Tourism Concern has also published a unique guidebook for travellers listing community tourism projects, *The Community Tourism Guide* (see notes to editors) many of which are

ecotourism holidays. Importantly, all of these projects are either run or managed by communities and the profits from tourism used for community development, such as water, education and health facilities.

"The only way that ecotourism can be truly beneficial is for it to be community-based. Some tour operators do work closely with local people in order for the communities to support their business and out of an honest desire to protect environments and optimise benefits to local people, but they are definitely in the minority," says Patricia Barnett.

"We hope that the International Year of Ecotourism will increase commitment amongst the tourism industry to be more community-focussed in the their development of ecotourism."

Examples of community-based ecotourism:

- **Namibia:** one of the most well-known countries for community-based tourism and safaris where a wide diversity of ethnic groups has become involved in tourism usually by setting up campsites supported by private and public initiatives. NACOBTA (The Namibian Community Based Tourism Association) represents and promotes 21 community camps, museum and tour businesses. The profits from tourism are divided amongst the communities and tourism is managed by them for their benefit.

www.nacobta.com.na

- **Ecuador:** Yachana Lodge was built by the Quichua community of Mondana. Visitors fish for piranha, swim in the Napo river and trek through the Amazon. Income from the lodge helps fund a health clinic, bee farm and permaculture farm. British tour operator, Tribes Travel, operates here working closely with the community.

www.tribes.co.uk

- **Kenya:** Porini Ecotourism Ltd., a Kenyan-based tour operator working closely with Tropical Places in the UK, has developed a safari camp and relevant infrastructure with a Maasai community in Amboseli. Porini lease the land from the Maasai, pay the community a bed-night fee for every tourist visitor and train and employ local Maasai as game rangers, road maintenance staff, trackers and guides, camp attendants and drivers.

www.porini.com

- **The Gambia:** normally known as a cheap winter-sun destination, The Gambia packs its charter tourists in along the coast, inland the country sees little benefits from tourism. The Tumani Tenda camp is a community-owned ecotourism project and its riverside accomodation is in low-impact, local-style houses. Visitors can

get close to the local villagers who offer them boat trips, forest walks, crafts workshops, dance and music. Local small businesses which have traditionally been marginalised by big international tourism players, have got together to provide local produce and services of a high standard to the tourism industry.

<http://www.subrosa.uk.com/asset/>

- **Thailand:** hundreds of thousands of tourists visit the hilltribes in northern Thailand. It's rare for the guide to have permission to take tourists to Tribal villages and little is done to ensure that the people visited benefit economically from the visitors or that their culture is respected. REST (Responsible Ecological and Social Tourism) trains hilltribe villagers on how best to manage tourism for their community. Villagers operate a home-stay programme for visitors and a family houses receive tourists in rotation. Tourists are also given important cultural guidance about their visit.

www.imaginative-traveller.com

Notes to Editors:

1. **UNEP sees the IYE as a chance to "assess what ecotourism is, or can be, rather than only a promotional event for UN member governments, for the private sector and for recipients of development aid."**
2. **In 2000, international tourist arrivals reached an all time high of 698 million, an increase of 7.4% which was double the growth rate of 1999, according to the World Tourism Organisation. Receipts from international travel, excluding airfares, climbed to US\$476 billion.**
3. **1.56 billion tourists are forecast to be travelling by 2020 (WTO).**
4. **A growth rate of 4.1 per cent is forecast for international tourism in 2001 (WTO).**
5. **Stated to be the world's largest industry, tourism employs 11 per cent of the global workforce - over 200 million people - either directly or indirectly (WTO).**
6. **A coalition of NGOs, co-ordinated by the Malaysian-based Third World Network working with the Thailand-based Tourism Information Monitoring team (TIM-team) have stated vociferous opposition to the IYE and campaigned to stop it going ahead. They were concerned that in light of fundamental environmental and human rights problems related to the tourism industry further promotion of ecotourism could destroy more biodiversity and harm local communities. In correspondence signed by 29 international NGOs to UNEP, the Tim-Team coalition cited various incidences where ecotourism is clearly working against local people and their environments.**

www.twinside.org.sg

7. **Research by the International Ecotourism Society (TIES) reveals that ecotourists are likely to be higher spenders on their holidays than ‘ordinary’ mass tourists. And high spending, nature-loving, responsible tourists are undoubtedly an attractive option for governments looking for ways of earning foreign-exchange.**
8. **Tourism Concern’s International Fair Trade in Tourism Network was established in 1999. For more information contact Tourism Concern.**
9. **Tourism Concern’s *Community Tourism Guide* is a unique guidebook which lists community-run or managed tourism projects world-wide, particularly in Southern countries. Many are ‘ecotourism’ holidays run by indigenous people.**
10. **Tourism Concern is a membership organisation campaigning on ethical and fairly traded tourism. Membership costs: £24 annual membership fee (UK only), £12 (unwaged).**
11. **EDITORS: Please include membership and contact details in any articles, plus details of The Community Tourism Guide: Tourism Concern, Stapleton House, 277-281 Holloway Road, London N7 8HN.**

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Ecotourism: At What Price?

In *Tok Blong Pasieik: News and Views on the Pacific Islands*.
Vol 55 No. 3 & 4. December 2001- February 2002.

“Tok Tok” by Rita Parikh (First Article in the Collection)

When the United Nations designated 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism, little did it know of the backlash this would ignite. After all, cultural and ecotourism – tourism that promised culturally-sensitive, nature-based, and environmental-sustainable tourist experiences – is being touted by national governments and international lenders as the greatest development strategy since the green revolution, a veritable panacea for cash-strapped, resource-poor and highly-indebted nations. Indeed, tourism already accounts for one in nine jobs in the global economy, generating revenues of more than U.S. \$620 billion annually, and ecotourism is the fastest growing of its subsectors. Fully one-quarter of all leisure travel is devoted by 10-15 per cent each year.

Yet peoples’ organizations across the world, from the Rethinking Tourism Project in the United States to Third World Network in Malaysia, have decried the new tourism push, arguing that cultural and ecotourism have failed on their promises to enhance the economic, social and environmental health of communities. Instead, as Raymond Chavez argues in the lead story of this special issue of *Tok Blong Pasifik*, they have opened fragile ecosystems to the devastating footprint of foreigners, and indigenous cultures to the commodifying glare of cameras.

To what extent does ecotourism offer economic opportunity to Pacific Islanders? What measures of control do indigenous peoples have over it? How are women being affected by this approach to community development? And what elements need to be considered for cultural and ecotourism to succeed? These are but a few of the questions explored in the pages that follow.

Chavez’s critical reflections on the high price indigenous peoples in the developing world are paying for tourism is set against Virginia Ducette’s exploration of one Canadian organization’s efforts to enhance aboriginal peoples’ control over cultural tourism. Gayle Nelson confronts the differential impact that ecotourism can have on men and women while Susan Marsden offers a museum curator’s perspective on the commodifying tendencies of cultural tourism.

Still, with careful attention to these threats, many believe that cultural and ecotourism operations can have a positive developmental impact on the lives and communities of Pacific Islanders. Several contributors from the Pacific, including Sharon and Doug Spence and Naomi Johnson, confirm this belief as they speak to efforts to build environmentally and economically sustainable marine ecotourism ventures.

While the authors differ in their perspectives on the merits and potential of ecotourism, they are all in agreement with one basic element: unless indigenous people create, manage and regulate tourism activities themselves, they and their communities will remain its victims and, like the promise of the green revolution, ecotourism's promise of sustainable development will never be realized.

For more information or a copy of this magazine, contact:

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Website: www.sppf.prg

Ecotourism: hope and reality – July 30, 2001

Online article written by Sue Wheat, editor of *In Focus*, the quarterly magazine of TourismConcern
Reprinted from internet publication <www.peopleandplanet.net/doc.php?id=1143>

"Getting away from it all," is understandably popular. With so many wonderful places in the world, prices of international travel falling, and the stresses and strains of everyday life increasing, more people are travelling. And as the population grows and incomes rise in many societies, the trend is steeply up.

In 2000, international tourist arrivals reached an all time high of 698 million, an increase of 7.4 per cent which was double the growth rate of 1999, according to the World Tourism Organisation. Receipts from international travel, excluding airfares, climbed to US\$476 billion.

"Tourism at the turn of the century is growing faster than even our most optimistic predictions," said WTO Secretary-General, Francesco Frangiali. The benefits of such growth say the WTO and tourism industry bodies such as the World Travel and Tourism Council, are employment and economic growth, particularly for emerging economies. Stated to be the world's largest industry, it employs 11 per cent of the global workforce - over 200 million people - either directly or indirectly.

But around every silver lining there is always a cloud, and as tourism grows, so too do the criticisms. Evidence of the downside of tourism - culturally, environmentally and economically - is now such that tourism has become a dirty word amongst many communities, environmental groups and human rights campaigners.

Disappearing dunes

Tourism's voracious appetite for basic resources - land, water and energy - has meant that the tourism industry and governments are increasingly finding themselves opposed over land rights and water rights by local people. Three quarters of the sand dunes on the Mediterranean coast between Spain and Sicily have now disappeared, largely because of the construction of hotels and holiday flats.

One of the most famous long-term tourism protests has been in Goa, India. With one five-star hotel consuming as much water as five local villages and one five-star tourist consuming 28 times more electricity per day than a local Goan, local discontent over resource-use is understandable.

This year saw a campaign by local environmentalists about the proliferation of plastic bottles and bags - a scourge that affects every tourist destination. Like most Southern countries, Goa is without a municipal rubbish collection system or recycling services, which means that the bags and bottles merely mount up on land or are dumped at sea.

Lack of access by locals to public beaches, violation by hotels of environmental regulations, and heavy-handed tactics by local authorities to free-up beach areas for hotels' use, have all been cited in legal disputes throughout the world. A proposal to develop Nungwi peninsula in the north of Zanzibar is a typical example. Locals alerted UK campaigning organisation, Tourism Concern to the fact that a massive British-led £14 billion tourism development was proposed, which would endanger the island's coral reef, water supplies, fishing and farming livelihoods and possibly evict up to 20,000 people. After a year of questioning and public campaigning in Zanzibar and the UK the development was halted.

Nature tourism

Over the last decade, understanding of the issues by the tourism industry, tourists, governments and communities has increased. Although often, it's been a complex debate. Even giving a name to a better, non-damaging, non-exploitative tourism, has been difficult. Numerous terms have been proffered; 'green' tourism, 'alternative' tourism, 'responsible' tourism, 'sustainable' tourism, 'eco' tourism, 'community' tourism, 'ethical' tourism, 'fairtrade' tourism and even, most recently, the particularly un-catchy, 'pro-poor' tourism.

Ecotourism is the most commonly understood term used by the public and commonly understood as tourism that focuses on an appreciation of the environment. And the market for nature holidays is a certainly a growing one. In 1993 the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) estimated nature tourism generates 7 per cent of all international travel expenditure. More recent research reveals this is now much higher, accounting for 20 per cent of international travel in the Asia-Pacific region and some areas, such as South Africa, experiencing a massive growth in visitors to game and nature reserves, of over 100 per cent annually.

Research by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) reveals that ecotourists are likely to be higher spenders on their holidays than 'ordinary' mass tourists. And high spending, nature-loving, responsible tourists are undoubtedly an attractive option for governments looking for ways of earning foreign-exchange.

Defining ecotourism

But as many critics point out, just because something is marketed as ecotourism, doesn't necessarily mean that long-term protection of the environment is automatically supported through it, even in countries which are well-known as ecotourism destinations like Belize or Costa Rica. Osmany Salas, executive director of the Belize Audubon Society, points out: "Tourism proceeds are not being reallocated to the management or enhancement of the natural systems or to compensate local individuals who are adversely affected by the presence of protected areas."

One of ecotourism's first problems is one of definition. Although TIES has a definition of "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people," There is no certification system to abide by or international monitoring body. The term can be used by anyone at anytime for anything from a small-scale locally-run rainforest lodge where the money goes to support a local community, to a large, luxury, foreign-owned resort which has little community involvement and uses masses of natural resources.

Ecotourists may even visit areas of national beauty and wildlife significance without realising that local people have been evicted from the area in order for ecotourism to be developed, as has happened in East Africa, India, Southern Africa and many other destinations.

With the growth in ecotourism, there are various changes ahead, says TIES executive-director, Megan Eplar-Wood. "The original entrepreneurs will reach their market through the Internet with increasing efficiency. But the lack of discipline of government and the demand for growth will undermine efforts to create sustainable ecotourism economies that are small but beautiful. Overbuilding and land speculation will continue to destroy once tranquil zones."

International year

Ron Mader, who runs a Latin American ecotourism website www.planeta.com feels that ecotourism should provide conservation measures, include meaningful community participation and be profitable and self-sustaining. But he notes that such criteria are difficult to measure and quantify: "Assuming you wanted to know which are the 'best ecotourism destinations' the question must follow: how is one to judge?"

Many countries are now questioning how ecotourism is any better for local people than mass tourism. "Two decades after it won independence from Britain, Belize finds itself yoked to another kind of colonial enterprise, the foreign-dominated ecotourism trade," says Linda Baker in a report, 'Enterprise at the Expense of the Environment', for [Environment News Network](#).

Despite these problems, an International Year of Ecotourism (IYE) has been declared by the United Nations for 2002. This will be co-ordinated by the WTO and UNEP and a range of activities held, including a World Ecotourism Summit from 19-22 May 2002 in Quebec, Canada plus various regional conferences. Oliver Hillel, the UNEP tourism programme co-ordinator sees the IYE as a chance to "assess what ecotourism is, or can be, rather than only a promotional event for UN member governments, for the private sector and for recipients of development aid."

Mekong plan

The IYE has been met with enthusiasm by many tourist boards and tour operators. The Ecotourism Association of Australia, for instance, states that it "recognises the unprecedented opportunity that this year provides, including benefits for nature tourism and ecotourism operators, the environment, indigenous communities, consumers and stakeholders involved with ecotourism."

However, a coalition of NGOs, co-ordinated by the Malaysian-based Third World Network working with the Thailand-based Tourism Information Monitoring team (TIM-team) have stated vociferous opposition to the IYE and are campaigning to stop it going ahead. "We are extremely concerned that this UN endorsement of ecotourism in light of all the fundamental problems related to the industry - in many cases another greenwash - will destroy more biodiversity and harm even more local communities," says Chee Yoke Ling, of the Third World Network. "That ecotourism is a viable strategy to replace other more unsustainable development activities is another myth that needs to be exploded."

In correspondence signed by 29 international NGOs to UNEP, the coalition have cited various incidents where ecotourism is clearly working against local people and their environments. They cite examples throughout Asia, including the ecotourism policy promoted by the tourism working group under the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) development scheme, led by the Asian Development Bank, which covers a vast area across Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam and Yunnan/China.

The GMS plan heavily relies on the construction of highways and entire cities dubbed as 'development corridors' as well as the building of airports, ports, large dams and other large-scale facilities. The ADB also revealed a plan to resettle 60 million ethnic highlanders from their homeland as part of a controversial watershed conservation project and to 'compensate' them with ecotourism jobs in new locations. Given that hilltribe tourism has been fraught with problems relating to accusations of 'human zoos' being created and financial exploitation of hilltribe villages by outside tour operators, this option has been met with much derision.

Lucrative market

The Third World Network question the long-term impact of promoting ecotourism. They point to the lack of foresight over the consequences of an ecotourism boom on environments and communities. They are also concerned about the increasing link of ecotourism to the multi-million dollar biotechnology industry through biopiracy in key ecotourist sites like rainforests, and the use of ecotourism by the World Bank's Social Investment Project to support massive development projects, some involving logging operations.

In April last year, 100 angry villagers in Khao Sok national park Surat Thani province, Thailand, seized a bulldozer owned by the Royal Forestry Department and trunks of trees they had felled for construction of a 1000 sq. m parking lot, a 800m-long road, 10 toilets

and concrete stairs leading to a pier in the park. Campaigners point out that villagers get arrested if they collect mushrooms in the forest, or corals in marine parks, yet various World Bank-funded projects are allowed to fell trees and make landscape alterations without prosecution, despite it being against national law.

It is clear to many that nature-based tourism is presently seen as one of the most lucrative niche markets, and powerful transnational corporations are likely to exploit the IYE to dictate their own definitions and rules of ecotourism on society, while people-centred initiatives will be squeezed out and marginalised.

The commitment of the tourism industry to tackle these complex issues seems limited. Many smaller operators are keen to work closely with local people in order for the communities to support their business and out of an honest desire to protect environments and optimise benefits to local people. Many are working closely with community-run tourism operations, such as those listed in Tourism Concern's Community Tourism Guide. However, such small operations make up a very small proportion of overall tourism facilities.

Willing to pay

"The mass tourism operators have learnt the language of sustainable tourism, or whatever you want to call it," says Tourism Concern's Patricia Barnett. "But little has really changed." Proof of this, she says, was seen last year when the Balearic islands decided to implement an eco-tax of 62p per visitor per day to raise funds to correct the serious environmental damage done to the Balearics over the tourism boom of the last three decades and to protect fragile areas that are left. The international tourism industry threw up their hands in horror and lobbied fiercely against it, saying that it would damage business. "We're not in favour of taxing tourists," says Keith Betton of the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA). "The Balearics should tax local hoteliers, who most benefit from tourism and are better placed to ensure that their elected representatives actually do spend the money in the intended way."

This flies in the face of ABTA's own research, which revealed that 64 per cent of people indicated they were prepared to pay an extra £10 to £25 for their holiday if it went towards environmental or social improvements. "It seems that when it comes down to it, the tourism industry just don't believe that people will put their money where their mouth is, and, because they operate on such small profit margins, aren't willing to take the risk," says Barnett.

An increasing number of commentators even within the industry are admitting there is something seriously wrong with the tourism industry and with ecotourism. "People talk about ecotourism, but the fact is that the tourism industry is always looking for a quick buck," says Doug Rhodes, owner of Hotel Paradiso del Oso in Cerocahui, Chihuahua in Mexico. "Hotels throughout the Copper Canyon still lack waste treatment facilities. Some of the garbage is thrown into the canyon or disposed of near community wells." But

tourists are willing to pay for such environmental guarantees he says and waste management technologies aren't prohibitively expensive. "It's just a matter of will."

This overview was written by Sue Wheat, editor of Tourism Concern's quarterly magazine, In Focus. Tourism Concern is a British membership organisation campaigning on ethical and fairly traded tourism. Check out it's site for membership details.

Contact: Tourism Concern. www.tourismconcern.org.uk, or info@tourismconcern.org.uk

Do We Need the International Year of Ecotourism?

By Anita Pleumarom, Tourism Investigation & Monitoring Team,
As part of the Clearinghouse for Reviewing Ecotourism (<http://www.twinside.org.sg/title/iye.htm>)

The first flush of ecotourism is running into trouble. Claims that we can protect nature, benefit local communities and also bring national revenues to the South are faced with a different reality on the ground. From Thailand to Belize, ecotourism has opened the doors to more forest destruction. Indigenous peoples in affected areas have been forced out of their traditional lands in some cases. Reports are also growing that such "tourists" are illegally collecting forest plants with potential medicinal value for the biotechnology industry.

So when the United Nations proclaimed 2002 as International Year of Ecotourism, many NGOs who have been monitoring tourism impacts went on the alert. In October this year, an international coalition of environmental, human rights and indigenous peoples groups launched a call for a fundamental reassessment of the UN Ecotourism Year 2002. They also denounce the lack of transparency and failure to meaningfully involve indigenous peoples and Southern organizations in ongoing preparations.

"We are extremely concerned that this UN endorsement of ecotourism in light of all the fundamental problems related to the industry - in many cases another greenwash - will destroy more biodiversity and harm even more local communities," said Chee Yoke Ling, a representative of the Third World Network based in Malaysia.

"I really think this is going to be worse than the launch of package tours to the Third World," commented Nina Rao from India, Southern co-chair of the NGO Tourism Caucus at the UN Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD).

The UN General Assembly had adopted a resolution (A/Res/53/200) in November 1998 to prepare for Ecotourism Year 2000. The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the UN-affiliated World Tourism Organization (WTO) are to organize activities and projects around the event, and one highlight will be the World Ecotourism Summit, to be held in Quebec, Canada, in May 2002.

Critics argue the UN has given approval and is making preparations for the Ecotourism Year, without proper examination of the nature of the ecotourism industry and its many negative impacts on the tourist destinations. A letter to UNEP's tourism programme coordinator, Oliver Hillel, signed by more than 20 groups from the South and North, says, "Too often, international agencies have used the South for misguided and outright destructive development experiments, and ... we oppose the idea that the International Year of Ecotourism serves as an instrument for ecotourism experiments in developing countries, which are likely to cause more harm than good."

The coalition letter vigorously questions claims that the ecotourism approach rectifies the economic inequalities, social injustices and ecological problems associated with conventional tourism. Rather, it warns, such developments have "opened opportunities

for a whole range of investors to gain access to remote rural, forest, coastal and marine areas", and "more encroachments, illegal logging, mining and plundering of biological resources occur, including biopiracy by unscrupulous and corporate collectors."

In the letter, the groups also point out that "governments are utterly ill equipped for the International Year of Ecotourism" and often "promote all forms of rural and nature tourism as ecotourism, while frameworks to effectively scrutinize, monitor and control developments are poorly developed or non-existent."

Ecotourism promoters primarily target indigenous peoples and their lands, ecosystems and cultures, and this has especially attracted criticisms from indigenous and Southern rights activists. Deborah McLaren, the coordinator of the US-based Rethinking Tourism Project that works for protection and preservation of indigenous lands and cultures expressed worries, "that much of what passes as 'ecotourism' is designed to benefit investors, empower managerial specialists, and delight tourists, not enhance the economic, social and ecological health of the host communities."

Rodney Bobiwash, director of the Forum for Global Exchange's Center for World Indigenous Studies stressed the need for a broader vision of indigenous concerns: "More than anybody, indigenous people realize that the discussion of tourism must be situated within a larger discourse encompassing the discussion of environmental and habitat protection, sustainable development, traditional knowledge, intellectual property regimes, biological diversity, access and benefit sharing, biopiracy and cultural property."

"Any discussion carried on without consideration of the cumulative impact of all of these processes will not only lack credibility but will also limit the opportunities for indigenous participation in the discourse," he said.

The Ecotourism Year is clouded with questions and doubts since its priorities and objectives are far from clear. Critics ask, for example, what will happen if this initiative suggests that all UN member countries should encourage ecotourism projects in rural and natural areas and many thousands of communities around the world end up competing with each other for a share of the tourism market? "...who will take responsibility, when ecotourism initiatives make investments based on miscalculated demand and later face decline, local businesses go bankrupt and entire communities are pushed into crisis?" ask the groups in the letter to UNEP.

Another scenario is that the event will encourage all holiday-makers to become ecotourists, resulting in hordes of travellers invading villages and protected areas, rather than staying in the existing tourist centres. Surely, such development could not be called "sustainable" and would have more undesirable impacts to add on to the vast problems already found in existing organized tourism.

The letter goes on to warn that ecotourism programmes that are promoted as part of the economic liberalization and globalization wave are likely to make matters worse. It states, "As supranational institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF and the World

Trade Organization are pressuring developing countries towards trade and investment liberalization, national and local governments are increasingly disabled to plan and manage tourism - and ecotourism - on their own terms."

It emphasizes that local concerns are at odds with the interests of "the corporate tourism industry, (which) aggressively pushes for non-intervention in companies' decision-making processes to expand their business and maximize their profits."

"As nature-based tourism is presently seen as one of the most lucrative niche markets, powerful transnational corporations are likely to exploit the International Year of Ecotourism to dictate their own definitions and rules of ecotourism on society, while people-centred initiatives will be squeezed out and marginalized," says the coalition letter.

With the services sector under tremendous pressure in the World Trade Organization to be opened to foreign corporations, there are signs already that tourism in the South, a major service industry, is eagerly targeted by transnational corporations.

Meanwhile, the NGO coalition's concerns have also been discussed within World Bank circles. One official, Kreszentia M. Duer, acknowledged that "if we don't take a strategic position on tourism development..., small-scale efforts for community-based tourism will always be overwhelmed by the powerful interests of big business and the enticements of the big pay-offs they can offer to government officials."

"Without organizational efforts...and a multi-pronged, strategic approach, community-based tourism will tend to remain ad hoc, piecemeal, and micro," she concluded, adding, "The 'International Year of Ecotourism' will be little more than rhetoric, unless these challenges are addressed directly."

The debates around the Ecotourism Year have been heavily overshadowed by politics and a serious conflict of interests has evolved. Critical NGO observers complain that corporate industry and large nature conservation/ecotourism organizations have colluded to lobby for the UN endorsement of ecotourism and now want to exploit it for self-serving purposes (e.g. to get free promotion or funding for their projects), while voices that question the interests of the protagonists are excluded or given only cursory treatment.

It is conspicuous, they point out, that only certain environmental NGOs and The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) have been allowed to play a key role in the preparations - exactly those organizations that have been strongly criticized by grassroots-oriented and indigenous groups for ignoring local people's concerns.

"In our experience, large nature conservation and development organizations do not respect (local people's) right," says a statement presented by a spectrum of indigenous peoples representatives and NGOs to more than 150 governments at a meeting on the

Convention on Biological Diversity in Nairobi, Kenya, last May. "For example, several activities undertaken by the Ecotourism Society, Conservation International

and IUCN do not respect the rights and interests of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, particularly in regard to Year of Ecotourism activities, and often threaten cultural and biological diversity."

Initially, the UN invited all concerned parties "to exert all possible efforts on behalf of the success of the Year" (Resolution 1998/40). But the question arises, success for whom? If the charges turn out to be true that only certain parties will reap the major benefits of the Ecotourism Year, the UN's integrity and its proclaimed mission to primarily work for the well-being of the world's poor and disadvantaged will surely be put in doubt.

Given the great contradictions and ironies surrounding this UN programme, the already shaky image of ecotourism may further deteriorate, to the point that the grandiose Ecotourism Year scheme collapses like a house of cards. Is it worth all the energy and money that the UN can ill afford?

For more information on the Campaign on the International Year of Ecotourism, please contact: Tourism Investigation & Monitoring Team at: tim-team@anet.net.th

And visit www.twinside.org.sg/tour.htm

UN Urged to Rethink Ecotourism Year - November 28, 2000.

From the Environmental News Service Internet Publication
<<http://ens.lycos.com/ens/nov2000/2000L-11-28-11.html>>

MADRID, Spain, November 28, 2000 (ENS) - To the World Tourism Organization, ecotourism deserves recognition, which is why the Madrid based United Nations body has declared 2002 International Year of Ecotourism.

To the Philippines environment ministry, ecotourism can be a dirty word, synonymous with biopiracy. Earlier this year, three French scientists were caught with illegally obtained plant specimens, believed to have medicinal values.

“At least one tree with cancer curing potential, four native vegetables, one snail which produces the most effective painkiller, an antibiotic soil fungus, one fruit tree and several rice varieties, have been stolen and are now owned by foreign pharmaceutical firms,” said Antonio Cerilles, Department of Environment and Natural Resources secretary.

Cerilles was explaining his order to the country's parks boards to enforce a "no permit, no collection" policy.

Through biopiracy, he said, "firms and foreign governments secretly work with scientists within victim nations. They patent and map chromosomes of genetic resources without informing, consulting and duly compensating the sources."

Cerilles claimed that the Philippine yew (*Taxus matrana*) was uprooted from Mount Pulag national park, Benguet, and patented for its cancer treating potential by researchers from the University of Massachusetts.

The line between biopiracy and ecotourism is becoming increasingly blurred according to British environmentalist Chris Lang.

In an interview with Anita Pleumarom of Third World Network, Lang described how he participated in a conservation research tour program to Vietnam in 1993, organized by the UK based non-profit organization Society for Environmental Exploration (SEE).

During the 10 week expedition operating under the name Frontier, Lang observed volunteers collecting a wide range of plant and insect samples in the forests of Tam Dao Nature Reserve and Ba Be National Park, without permission from park officials. The specimens were later taken out of the country.

Frontier bills itself as an initiative that "brings ordinary people to the forefront of conservation research, enabling them to become involved in vital scientific work."

"Governments and other concerned parties should be alerted and seriously ponder the question whether it is wise to indiscriminately promote tourism forms that facilitate the stealing and smuggling of local biological resources and traditional knowledge, before

necessary legal frameworks and administrative mechanisms are in place to effectively combat abuses and exploitation," writes Pleumarom.

Pleumarom doubts the world needs International Year of Ecotourism and a coalition of non-governmental organizations (NGO) agree with her. Last month environmental, human rights and indigenous peoples groups called for a fundamental reassessment of the UN Ecotourism Year.

"We are extremely concerned that this UN endorsement of ecotourism in light of all the fundamental problems related to the industry - in many cases another greenwash - will destroy more biodiversity and harm even more local communities," said Chee Yoke Ling, of the Third World Network based in Malaysia.

"I really think this is going to be worse than the launch of package tours to the Third World," said Nina Rao from India, Southern co-chair of the NGO Tourism Caucus at the UN Commission for Sustainable Development.

The UN General Assembly decided in November 1998 to prepare for International Year of Ecotourism. The UN Environment Program (UNEP) and the World Tourism Organization (WTO) are organizing activities and projects around the event. The highlight will be the World Ecotourism Summit, to be held in Quebec, Canada, in May 2002.

UNEP and WTO list the following objectives:

- Generate greater awareness among public authorities, the private sector, the civil society and consumers regarding ecotourism's capacity to contribute to the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage in natural and rural areas, and the improvement of standards of living in those areas.
- Disseminate methods and techniques for the planning, management, regulation and monitoring of ecotourism to guarantee its long-term sustainability.
- Promote exchanges of successful experiences in the field of ecotourism.
- Increase opportunities for the efficient marketing and promotion of ecotourism destinations and products on international markets.

Critics argue the UN has examined the ecotourism industry's negative impacts. In a letter to UNEP's tourism program coordinator, Oliver Hillel, signed by more than 20 groups, international agencies are blamed for "misguided and outright destructive development experiments," in the southern hemisphere.

"We oppose the idea that the International Year of Ecotourism serves as an instrument for ecotourism experiments in developing countries, which are likely to cause more harm than good," said the letter.

Ecotourism that targets indigenous peoples and their lands, ecosystems and cultures, has attracted criticism.

Deborah McLaren, coordinator of the U.S. based Rethinking Tourism Project that works for protection and preservation of indigenous lands and cultures worries, "that much of what passes as ecotourism is designed to benefit investors, empower managerial specialists, and delight tourists, not enhance the economic, social and ecological health of the host communities."

Rodney Bobiwash, director of the Forum for Global Exchange's Center for World Indigenous Studies stressed the need for a broader vision of indigenous concerns.

"More than anybody, indigenous people realize that the discussion of tourism must be situated within a larger discourse encompassing the discussion of environmental and habitat protection, sustainable development, traditional knowledge, intellectual property regimes, biological diversity, access and benefit sharing, biopiracy and cultural property," said Bobiwash.

The coalition's letter questioned claims that ecotourism rectifies economic inequalities, social injustices and ecological problems associated with conventional tourism. It warns, such developments have "opened opportunities for a whole range of investors to gain access to remote rural, forest, coastal and marine areas", and "more encroachments, illegal logging, mining and plundering of biological resources occur, including biopiracy by unscrupulous and corporate collectors."

The groups claimed that "governments are utterly ill equipped for the International Year of Ecotourism" and often "promote all forms of rural and nature tourism as ecotourism.

"Frameworks to effectively scrutinize, monitor and control developments are poorly developed or non-existent," continued the letter.

Finally, the groups warn that International Year of Ecotourism is ripe for exploitation.

"As nature based tourism is presently seen as one of the most lucrative niche markets, powerful transnational corporations are likely to exploit the International Year of Ecotourism to dictate their own definitions and rules of ecotourism on society, while peoplecentred initiatives will be squeezed out and marginalized," said the coalition letter.

To read more about International Year of Ecotourism, visit <http://www.world-tourism.org/omt/ecotourism2002.htm>. For more on the criticisms of the year, visit <http://www.twinside.org.sg/tour.htm>

Source - <http://ens.lycos.com/ens/nov2000/2000L-11-28-11.html>

CLEARINGHOUSE FOR REVIEWING ECOTOURISM, No.1

INTRODUCTION TO THE CLEARINGHOUSE FOR REVIEWING ECOTOURISM

We are pleased to inform you about a new information service as part of our campaign '2002: International Year of REVIEWING Ecotourism' (for background information on this campaign, visit Third World Network's website at www.twinside.org.sg/title/iyeh.htm.) The aim of this Clearinghouse is to counter-balance the many embellishing and obfuscating representations of ecotourism by bringing the 'real world' of this industry to public attention.

We are taking this initiative to disseminate sincere and critical assessments that explain the root causes of ecotourism-related problems and focus on the real needs and aspirations of societies in destination countries. We are concerned that information and proposals from the tourism establishment, international bodies and consultants do not adequately reflect the reality on the ground. Nor are they sufficient to enable national governments to make policy and project decisions that are in line with sustainable development.

This also applies to UNEP and the World Tourism Organization (WTO-OMT), the key agencies implementing the controversial UN-initiated International Year of Ecotourism (IYE). Although some open-minded UNEP and WTO-OMT officials may be willing to consider our recent appeal to Kofi Annan to make the Year a 'Reviewing Ecotourism' event, there can be little doubt that the actual purpose of the IYE is to develop commercial opportunities and boost business in ecotourism.

In their official joint statement on the IYE, UNEP and WTO-OMT have pointed out the "efficient marketing and promotion of ecotourism destinations and products on international markets" as a major objective. Also, their proclaimed intention is "to offer an opportunity to review SUCCESSFUL ecotourism experiences world-wide".

Unfortunately, this is a selective and short-sighted approach that primarily serves to build a positive public image for private industry, government bodies and other institutions that have a keen interest in ecotourism promotion for self-serving purposes. Meanwhile, the majority of the people directly affected continue to be marginalized, and discussions on genuinely sustainable and self-reliant development alternatives to tourism remain disregarded.

Against this background, we believe it is not only legitimate but highly necessary to provide a forum to discuss the crucial issues that ecotourism proponents generally omit and to offer an opportunity for civic groups and ordinary citizens, particularly from the Third World, to make their voices better heard.

With this Clearinghouse, we want to bring forth non-corporate and holistic perspectives on ecotourism and the IYE, by presenting articles that, for example,

- explore the political and economic structures and forces of globalization that drive the international ecotourism industry;

- discuss fundamental questions and deficiencies concerning the definition, concept, policies and practices of ecotourism;
- examine the impacts on local communities and the environment in the context of unequal relations, especially between the North and the South, and dependent development;
- make local struggles against socially and ecologically harmful ecotourism projects visible;
- expose dubious initiatives by tourism developers and operators to “greenwash” themselves in the name of ecotourism;
- document and critically analyze the IYE process and related events and highlight people’s action in response.

With all these burning issues, we very much appreciate your contributions and suggestions on how to develop this information service. Please also help to make this initiative known to other concerned and interested organizations and individuals so that we can expand our list of subscribers and contributors. We are planning mail-outs 2-3 times a month, according to the availability and relevance of materials.

By making a collective effort to develop a more broad-based and coherent ecotourism critique, we also hope to broaden the perspective of the UN as a whole in addition to UNEP and WTO-OMT and to persuade them to take responsibility by raising awareness among member countries and the general public about the serious problems and risks associated with ecotourism. We know this is by no means an easy task. For instance, it also took many years of hard and persistent work and lobbying by civil society organizations fighting child sex tourism before inter-governmental bodies eventually acknowledged the truth and became active on that issue.

Since the corporate tourism industry has become the principal force in the promotion and development of ecotourism, we are starting with an article that sheds light on the organization and agenda of the world’s biggest tourism actors and calls for a Campaign On Corporate Power In Tourism (COCPIT). It also questions the move of the UN and other inter-governmental bodies to form partnerships with large transnational tourism companies and associations and includes a detailed profile of the WTO-OMT, a key organizer of the IYE. A clearer understanding of the contemporary structures and politics of tourism will hopefully help to put the global ecotourism industry and the IYE into proper perspective.

The Campaign coordinating groups:

Third World Network
 Tourism Investigation & Monitoring Team (tim-team), Thailand
 Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM), Malaysia
 Consumers Association Penang (CAP), Malaysia

CLEARINGHOUSE FOR REVIEWING ECOTOURISM, No. 13

We are delighted that civic groups and the media participate in the Reviewing Ecotourism process and help to raise awareness about the risks of the International Year of Ecotourism (IYE). Here are two examples from Europe on how this is being done. Firstly, the Arbeitskreis Tourismus & Entwicklung (AKTE; Working Group on Tourism & Development), a Swiss organization based in Basle, has produced a paper in German, French and English, which explains the need for a fundamental reassessment of ecotourism and, thus, contributes to foster informed public discussions on IYE-related issues; AKTE's document was also distributed among delegates at a recent meeting of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Peoples in Geneva. Secondly, we present a summary of a long feature article, written by Sarah Marriott of the Irish Times, which examines the question "Is Ecotourism a Greenwash?" and highlights the IYE controversy.

On this occasion, we renew our call to actively support our campaign for an 'International Year of Reviewing Ecotourism' and to contribute case studies and analyses that bring forth grassroots perspectives on ecotourism. The official IYE preparations show that UNEP and the World Tourism Organization (WTO) primarily focus on organizing large conferences that are overly dominated by tourism officials, businesspeople and consultants. There is still a clear emphasis on promotion and marketing of ecotourism, while people's voices continue to be neglected, even though UNEP had agreed to undertake a review and to improve participation of all concerned parties. Increased efforts are needed to persuade the concerned inter-governmental agencies to take responsibility, e.g. by fully informing member countries and the general public about the manifold problems associated with ecotourism and by urging decision-makers at all levels to enforce effective development controls. In addition, civil society organizations and the media have to play a key role in furthering impartial investigations and monitoring activities, if it is to prevent major damages that the IYE is likely to bring.

The campaign coordinating groups:

Third World Network

Tourism Investigation & Monitoring Team (t.i.m.-team), Thailand

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM), Malaysia

Consumers Association of Penang (CAP), Malaysia

Evaluation of "Ecotourism" Needed

Environmental and human rights organizations fear that the International Year of Ecotourism 2002 (IYE) will primarily serve the interests of international tourism companies. They demand a fundamental review of the "ecotourism" model.

By Marianne Frei, Arbeitskreis Tourismus & Entwicklung (akte), Switzerland

The Cordillera Region in the north of the Philippines is world-famous for its beautiful landscape and its traditional rice terraces. Its attraction for foreign visitors is further increased by the "exotic" diversity of indigenous peoples' cultures. It is an "ideal tourist site", according to the Philippine government that intends to generate income through "ecotourism" while promoting environmental awareness and preservation of the cultural and natural diversity at the same time. Therefore, it spends a lot of money for the development of tourism infrastructure, whereas hardly any funds are left for the enhancement of agriculture. But "nature" and "culture" put onto the market by the tourism department do not belong to the government, complains Joan Carling from

the Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA). “The people have the right to decide what to do with their resources and with their culture. The government has no right to make a Tourism Master Plan for them and to sell them. And if the people decide to utilize their resources for tourism, they ought to be the ones to benefit from it.”

The dark side of “ecotourism”

Lack of participation in the decision-making process and inequitable distribution of tourism benefits are not only unsolved problems in the Cordillera Region of the Philippines but in many “ecotourism” projects located in natural areas of the South. Most of these projects are initiated and controlled by outsiders. Thus, a large proportion of income leaks away to national centers and partially to foreign countries, and too often, just a small share is available for nature conservation and income generation at the local level. In many cases, locals are left with no more than a few low-qualified jobs. Particularly in remote areas, residents are overlooked in the process of developing tourism, often because they do not have secure land rights or legal control over resource management. Even today, people especially indigenous communities are driven from their land or have their traditional customary rights abolished so that they lose access to natural resources, due to the establishment of new protected areas.

Furthermore, it is problematic that in the name of “ecotourism”, new supposedly “untouched” areas are opened up for investors, whereas little is done to make existing tourism more sustainable. According to critics from various countries, this has caused additional environmental destruction. Among other things, the opening up of more natural areas is said to have encouraged illegal logging and mining activities and settlements. Hence, the attempt to keep out less sustainable land-uses by introducing “ecotourism” has often led to the opposite result.

Even sharing traditional knowledge about medicinal plants and local plants - a special attraction of many “eco-tours” - bears risks. The Philippine Ministry for the Environment, for example, is aware of several cases of biopiracy, in which foreign pharmaceutical and agricultural companies successfully claimed intellectual property rights on valuable natural resources that had been illegally smuggled out of the country by scientists. Unless preventive measures are taken, the services of local nature interpreters can be abused very easily by profit-oriented research interests.

However, environmental constraints do not only occur in “ecotourism” destinations. Many of the biodiversity-rich places are located in Third World countries, and therefore the majority of “ecotourists” has to travel over long distances to reach their destination mostly by airplane. The leisure traffic is rarely considered in the debate about “ecotourism”, even though air travel is already responsible for 13 per cent of CO₂-emissions generated by the Swiss population, for example. The contribution of air traffic to global warming, which has devastating effects on nature and the entire environment, is substantial and rapidly increasing.

“Ecotourism” a controversial term

Under the label of “ecotourism”, a wide range of tourism products are on offer, which sometimes have only one thing in common: They include - at least for a short period of the trip - a visit to a natural area. An internationally recognized definition, which would clarify what criteria are to be used to measure the implementation of “ecotourism”, does not yet exist.

Nevertheless, the United Nations have declared 2002 the “International Year of Ecotourism” (IYE). This has alarmed many indigenous communities and environmental and human rights organizations, particularly from the South. They fear that transnational corporations might use the IYE to enforce their own visions and definitions of “ecotourism”. In fact, the Year also allows plenty of scope for interpretation. According to the organizers at the World Tourism Organization (WTO) and the UN Environmental Programme (UNEP), the United Nations have not provided any guidelines for the organization of the IYE. Thus, the goals and priorities have yet to be agreed on.

For the time being, the WTO and UNEP are taking their bearings from the definitions developed by the International Ecotourism Society (TIES) and by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) - organizations that primarily aim to finance conservation measures and nature reserves, generate local income and increase the acceptance of nature conservation among residents. However, the US-based organization “Rethinking Tourism Project” (RTP) maintains it is incomprehensible that these definitions that have been repeatedly rejected by indigenous peoples, are still being used as guidance, while the “ecotourism” definition developed by several NGOs, indigenous organizations and trade unions on the occasion of the 8th Session of the Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD8) 2000 has been ignored. The latter puts emphasis on self-determined and sustainable development, a process in which all concerned parties are involved as equal and fully informed participants. This explicitly includes the right of indigenous communities to decide against a tourism development in their home territory.

In this context, it is important to raise the question of power and influence of the parties involved. In principle, the “ecotourism” model is based on the assumption that the cooperation between the tourism industry, nature conservation organizations, governments and local communities will finally lead to successful planning and implementation of “ecotourism”. Common interests are emphasized. The fact that in practice, “ecotourism” has so far only been able to fulfill its promises to a very limited extent, is usually explained with insufficient planning and implementation, and that will have to be further optimized for example with the help of “best practices”. What is ignored, however, is that traditional communities in many natural areas have been - and still are - the targets of repressive and exploitative policies by their country’s dominant social groups. Their political and economic influence is accordingly small. In view of the often contradictory interests and motives of the parties involved, the fundamental question needs to be raised whether the “ecotourism” model will be able to fulfill its “win-win” promise with respect to disadvantaged population groups.

Reassessment of the “International Year of Ecotourism 2002”

Meanwhile, an international coalition of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has been formed, which calls for a reassessment of the Year. Instead of pushing ahead a “promotional year” for a form of tourism that is so vaguely defined, the Year should rather be used to critically review so-called “ecotourism” and its impacts on the environment and people’s lives. In January 2001, the coalition sent a letter to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan as well as to the organizers at the WTO and UNEP, demanding that the Year be renamed the “International Year of Reviewing Ecotourism” and that an independent evaluation commission be set up to examine related issues. In addition, the coalition demands that the WTO and UNEP take a more serious approach to participation in their preparatory work. For in the follow-up of the Earth Summit of Rio (1992), the United Nations has committed themselves to a “Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue” that is meant to ensure the meaningful involvement of all parties concerned. Yet, the WTO and UNEP only invited one NGO representative from the South to the IYE preparatory meeting last

February, and she even had to cancel her participation because funds for travel and accommodation were not provided.

An evaluation is urgently needed

A thorough evaluation of “ecotourism” is necessary indeed. “Ecotourism” is today considered as one of the most dynamically growing niche markets of the globalized tourism industry. Recently, it has even become a prominent subject on the international political stage. However, the tourism industry has not been able to substantiate the claim that it could make a significant contribution to poverty reduction. On the contrary, given the financial results of transnational tourism corporations and the concentration processes in the industry, one can assume that this big business rather contributes to a redistribution of income from the poor to the rich. The frequently expressed hope, namely that “ecotourism” could be more than a niche product and, indeed, become a model for a sustainable functioning of the tourism industry, seems to be increasingly doomed in the light of international economic policy.

As long as liberalization agreements in the service sector, such as the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), and their effects on nature and the host population are left out of the debate, the hopes for genuinely sustainable “ecotourism” can hardly be taken seriously. It is precisely this service liberalization that also affects “ecotourism” projects, which worsens the chances of financially weak and vulnerable actors to survive the worldwide escalating competition in the industry. Self-determined community-based “ecotourism” projects, which invest in the sustainable utilization of resources and foster broad political and economic participation, often do not have the necessary experience to generate significant income and to withstand the competition from financially strong large companies.

GATS also does not adequately address environmental issues. National and local authorities’ scope to introduce rules for the protection of natural resources will probably be strongly limited by international commitments. The Indian organization “Equations” has expressed fears that the free import of technology, know-how, finances, labour and other services could result in increasing marginalization of local providers, the opening up of natural areas and more development of tourism infrastructure, without heeding ecological criteria.

Different interests, different logic

Hence, those who put “ecotourism” into the spotlight of the international public as a desirable goal, must not omit the political frameworks of trade and finance. Wolfgang Strasdas characterizes “ecotourism” in developing countries as an activity that intersects different systems - nature conservation, tourism, development cooperation. Although there may be common interests, contradictions always remain because each system basically follows its own logic. The tourism system primarily aims to enforce its economic self-interests in global markets. Due to its fragmented organizational structure - the various actors and corporations involved at the local, national and international levels -, tourism as an industry has a tendency towards short-term thinking and the externalization of operating costs. In contrast, nature conservation tries to realize long-term interests for the common good.

According to Strasdas, actors in each system understand - or accept - interventions from outside only if they correspond to the logic of their own system. Conservation organizations have realized this and are now offering the tourism industry and local entrepreneurs in natural areas a market-oriented response to the question as to why nature conservation is a worthwhile goal.

Through “ecotourism”, natural assets are being turned into commercial products, and two objectives can be achieved simultaneously: to generate money for nature conservation and to make the local population aware of the value of an intact environment. But that supports the argument that traditional subsistence economies are neither productive nor profitable, and local people are not utilizing natural resources in a sustainable way. The fact that in many places, indigenous communities - with their well-adapted economy and way of living - have ensured the maintenance of biodiversity-rich ecosystems for generations, is often ignored.

Even if in some cases, highly destructive activities - such as oil drilling - can be averted, an essential question is whether the commercialization of natural areas through tourism is really compatible with the goals of environmental protection and in the interest of local traditional economic and cultural systems. The “International Year of Reviewing Ecotourism” offers an opportunity to bring forth such long-overdue analyses and to learn from the experiences of the affected people in the South.

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- Wolfgang Strasdas, “Oekotourismus in der Praxis” (Ecotourism in practice), Ammerland, 2001;
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This is a revised version of a paper the Arbeitskreis Tourismus & Entwicklung (Working Group on Tourism & Development, AKTE) distributed among delegates at a meeting of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Peoples in Geneva last July. The article was also published in German language in the periodical “integra“ in June 2001. German and French versions of the paper can be requested at AKTE, Missionsstrasse 21, CH-4003 Basle, Switzerland, Tel. +41 61 261 47 42, Fax +41 61 261 47 21, e-mail: info@akte.ch, website: www.akte.ch.

Is Ecotourism a Greenwash?

Since ecotourism facilitates the opening up of ecologically and culturally sensitive areas, it can be worse than mainstream tourism, argues Sarah Marriott of the Irish Times.

“Whale-watching in Ecuador may be more exciting than waterskiing in Alicante; trekking in Nepal may be more spectacular than trailing around New York, and seeing hill-tribe villages in Thailand may be more interesting than sunbathing in Turkey, but many of these ‘alternative holidays’, which are advertised as ‘green’ or ‘eco’, may actually damage the environment, local communities and wildlife,” she writes.

Drawing on experiences from many parts of the world, Marriott finds that ecotours often fail to live up with the standards, and even well-intentioned holidays and activities may cause long-term damages to the environment and particularly indigenous communities. Even small tour groups or lone travellers can have devastating effects on local communities. For instance, Survival International, a campaign group for tribal peoples, has warned tourists not to visit any of the little-contacted tribes on India's Andaman Islands as there is the possibility that they pass on diseases such as measles, which can be fatal for the tribals.

Indigenous peoples are featured in brochures and on postcards as major tourist attractions, but there is clearly a lack of sensitivity for the people visited. Rigoberta Manchu, a Guatemalan Quiche Indian and Nobel Peace Prize winner, is quoted as saying: "What hurts Indian most is that our costumes are considered beautiful, but it's as if the person wearing it didn't exist."

"Governments of some developing countries promote ecotourism and indigenous cultures, but seem to lack respect for tribal land rights or traditions," says Marriott. "In Paraguay, the state tourist-board brochures promote indigenous cultures, yet racist views have been expressed by officials. One diplomat complained: 'The Indians have become mercenary, changing their traditional dances for the tourists' benefit', while a former director of Paraguay's airline commented: 'The trouble with Indians is that they don't do any work, they don't produce wealth, they bring backwardness'."

The Irish Times article also points out the threat of bio-plundering in relation to ecotourism. "Biopiracy, the theft of seeds and plants with medicinal benefits and even genes of indigenous people, is on the increase - and could be linked to ecotourism," it says. "At a recent international NGO workshop in Zimbabwe, participants warned that, under the guise of ecotourism, scouts from biotech companies are using local people as 'nature interpreters' in biodiversity rich places, to discover plants with commercial value. Biopiracy has been in the news recently in India, when two 'tourists' were discovered leaving the country with 1,000 rare species of butterfly."

Although Marriott acknowledges that not all ecotourist initiatives cause problems and some benefit communities as well as the environment, she notes that "the creation of such popular eco-destinations as national parks and protected areas is destructive - when it ignores the rights and needs of tribal peoples". She cites the examples of Kenya and Tanzania, where many Maasai herdsmen have been excluded from essential grazing lands because of the establishment of national parks.

She further reports about the Botswana government's current attempt to remove the indigenous people who live in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. The Reserve, covering an area larger than Switzerland, was created in the 1960s as a safe haven for the Bushmen people and the animals on which they depend. The Bushmen have lived in the Kalahari Desert for thousands of years. But according to a Survival International report, they are now forced to live in camps and not allowed to hunt, although the government encourages hunting as a tourist activity elsewhere in the country. In August 2000, the 600 Bushmen, who had successfully resisted the forced evacuation of more than 1,000 people in 1997, were reportedly beaten and tortured by wildlife department officials.

Tourism activities and wildlife conservation in parks do not always match well, suggests Marriott, referring to a recent article in the Scientist magazine about the Wolong Nature Reserve in Southwest China. The research revealed that the habitat of pandas there was more rapidly destroyed than in areas not protected. While the human population had increased by 70 per cent

since the park was established, the number of pandas had dropped from 145 in 1974 to only 72 in 1986. "Tourists don't think they have an impact on panda habitation, but indirectly, each visitor has some impact," the report was quoted as saying. "They come, they take their summer vacations there and stimulate the local economy, which in turn uses more local natural resources."

Marriott's article also highlights cultural and natural places listed by UNESCO as World Heritage Sites and points to the problem that an inscription of a site onto the list does not necessarily mean that it is protected from a tourism onslaught. "UNESCO's WHC [World Heritage Committee]... is an advisory body and has no powers to restrict development, pollution or even destruction of heritage sites," it notes. "It is in something of a catch 22 situation, since inscription of a site onto the list can encourage tourists to visit; then governments and entrepreneurs, particularly in developing countries, take advantage of this; and the site becomes increasingly commercialized."

The 1,300-year-old township of Lijiang in China's Yunnan province, which became a World Heritage Site in 1997, is cited as a glaring example. "...surviving the Mongol hordes, the Communist regime and earthquakes was easier than withstanding the advent of tourism", which has resulted in a rapid erosion of the unique Naxi culture.

"UNESCO's inability to prevent development can have damaging consequences for heritage" says Marriott. She reports about the danger of a government-approved plan that includes the building of a cable car up the mountain at Macchu Pichu, the world-famous 600-year-old Inca city in Peru. After UNESCO indicated it might remove Macchu Pichu from the World Heritage list if the project went ahead, authorities postponed the construction of the cable car two years ago (which means the project can be revived at any time). Last year, a UNESCO team found that the area, which is visited by some 350,000 tourists a year, has reached saturation point and will not withstand any increase in tourist traffic. No new construction should take place and tourist services be reduced to save the site, concluded UNESCO's survey.

Tourism is said to be the biggest industry in the world and ecotourism the fastest growing section in the international tourism market. However, the economic benefits for Third World destinations are limited. Marriott states, "...much of the money tourist spend in developing countries (on accommodation, food, drink and travel) ends up back in Western countries. This 'leakage' means holidays, particularly 'all-inclusives', in developing countries generate more money for Western companies than for the local communities."

Yet, the UN General Assembly has designated 2002 the International Year of Ecotourism (IYE), which has triggered a major controversy. After outlining the activities of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Tourism Organization for the IYE, such as organizing a World Ecotourism Summit in Canada, the article voices the concerns of environmental, human rights and indigenous peoples groups that the UN-initiated programme may reinforce "greenwashing" activities and result in an influx of travellers in environmentally and culturally fragile areas, leading to more destruction. It also quotes from the NGO coalition's letter to UNEP: "As nature-based tourism is presently seen as one of the most lucrative niche markets, powerful transnational corporations are likely to exploit the International Year of Ecotourism to dictate their own definitions and rules of ecotourism on society, while people-centred initiatives will be squeezed out and marginalized."

For the full article, see Irish Times, 26 May 2001, website: <http://scripts.ireland.com>

CLEARINGHOUSE FOR REVIEWING ECOTOURISM, No. 18

Today, we are pleased to share with you reflections on the disputed International Year of Ecotourism (IYE) and ecotourism development in Mozambique by Tamsyn Reynolds, an investigative journalist based in Cape Town, South Africa. The Mozambican case study shows that a large ecotourism scheme in the Bazaruto Archipelago, the Vilanculos Coastal Wildlife Sanctuary, is generating the same pattern of problems like in other developing countries: discrimination of local residents, displacement, disruption of traditional economic activities and loss of natural diversity, for example. Yet, the government reportedly considers the project as a "model" for future developments in the country.

Notably, the first regional conference in preparation for the IYE on "Planning, Development and Management of Ecotourism in Africa" was organized by the World Tourism Organization (WTO-OMT) in Mozambique's capital Maputo last March. Although some of the negative ecotourism impacts on local communities and the environment were articulated at the meeting, the WTO-OMT report concluded, "...2002 presents an excellent platform to display Africa's success stories. Africa's enthusiasm for ecotourism needs to be communicated [to the World Ecotourism Summit] in Quebec in 2002..." While African official and business-minded circles backed by WTO-OMT were primarily interested to make the IYE an opportunity to put the region onto the world's ecotourism map, local people's voices and reality-based case studies were neglected as usual.

The campaign coordinating groups:

Third World Network

Tourism Investigation & Monitoring Team (t.i.m.-team), Thailand

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM), Malaysia

Consumers Association of Penang (CAP), Malaysia

International Year of Ecotourism 2002 and a Case Study from Mozambique

By Tamsyn Reynolds

The United Nations' declaration in 1998 of 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism (IYE) has sparked major concern among NGOs worldwide. There is a growing awareness that ecotourism is not the benign enterprise many believed it would be; that it falls far short of its stated aims, and of the principles which supposedly underlie it: conservation of nature and cultures, benefits to local people, and local participation.

In a much-publicised letter to United Nations General Secretary Kofi Annan, members of the Third World Network, an international group of organizations and individuals involved in issues relating to development, have called on the UN for a fundamental reassessment of the IYE. They want it renamed the International Year of Reviewing Ecotourism, and say that "Unless the [World Tourism Organisation] and the [United Nations Environmental Programme] agree to initiate a comprehensive and sincere reassessment, we shall direct all our efforts to resist the IYE. We demand a complete review of ecotourism issues that takes into consideration the political, social, economic and developmental conditions and the serious issues of globalisation."

The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), who, together with the World Tourism Organisation (WTO-OMT) is the official organiser, has responded by including review as one of the wider aims of the IYE. However, the original spirit - one of celebration of ecotourism still seems to be dominant. Review is not one of the four core objectives, as listed in UNEP and WTO-OMT's joint statement. Instead, the objectives are primarily concerned with improving the marketing and promotion of ecotourism; exchanging successful experiences in the industry; and generating awareness of its capacity to contribute to the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage in remote areas, and to improve standards of living.

The Third World Network (TWN), along with other civil society organisations and activists, is concerned about both the running of the IYE primarily issues to do with transparency and participation and its substance: the promotion of an industry with inherent problems and serious dangers.

The Tourism Lobby

Ecotourism should be understood as part of tourism, an industry whose proponents frequently boast is the largest in the world. Over the last two decades, it has made its way into the tourism mainstream, and is now the fastest growing sub-sector of the industry. It's part of the general "greening" of business that sees companies like BP sponsoring wildlife initiatives and sporting a green, leafy logo.

Under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), the tourism industry is one of the most deregulated and centralized in the world. It is strongly dominated by transnational corporations: major hotel, leisure and travel companies, almost all of them based in tourist-generating countries in the West.

Even the United Nations' WTO-OMT is business orientated it's the only intergovernmental organisation that permits membership by the private sector. While private members, such as Arthur Anderson, Euro Disney and ITC Hotels, used to be "affiliates", their role was upgraded in 1997 when the Business Association (WTOBC) was formed, with the aim of giving "greater purpose to a mixed collection of different interest groups which include airlines, hotel groups, travel agents, tour operators and international associations..."

Together they form a very powerful pro-tourism lobby. The WTO-OMT has called the tourism industry "one of the most remarkable economic and social phenomena of the last century". It's pitched as a development strategy, the general idea being that, as a generator of jobs and wealth as a conduit through which prosperity can flow from the developed to the developing world all efforts should be directed at ensuring it grows without barriers or restrictions. With that in mind, one of the main aims of the WTO-OMT is encouraging further liberalisation of the international tourism industry.

With the forthcoming IYE, the tourism lobby is directing itself at ecotourism, an increasingly fashionable niche. While it has become more and more difficult to deny that conventional mass tourism has serious negative consequences, ecotourism is touted as a win-win form of tourism, a panacea that offers all of the benefits, without the drawbacks.

In another letter, this time to UNEP's Tourism Programme Coordinator, Oliver Hillel, the TWN and others say that one of the "most worrisome aspects is that the UN General Assembly and agencies have agreed to give the green light for the IYE without first making an adequate assessment of the nature of the ecotourism industry and its multi-dimensional effects."

There are powerful arguments that ecotourism is not only full of empty promises, but actually poses a very real and serious threat to environments, economies and indigenous populations all over the globe, but particularly in the third world. While its supposed benefits are often illusive or fall into the wrong hands its costs can be huge, including displacement of the local population, social degradation, environmental ruin, economic disruption and the facilitation of biopiracy.

Ecotourism in the Bazaruto Archipelago, Mozambique

By its very nature, ecotourism targets the earth's last untouched, pristine (undeveloped) areas, and "authentic", "pure" cultures, opening them up for investment and development.

One such place is the Bazaruto Archipelago in Mozambique. It comprises five exceptionally beautiful and highly sensitive tropical islands that have a wide range of distinct terrestrial and marine habitats, including coastal sand dunes, pioneer dune vegetation, coral reefs, mangroves and seagrass beds. They are home to a myriad of species of flora and fauna, including red duikers, crocodiles, night apes, samango monkeys, and over 180 species of bird. There are also dolphins (spinner, humpback, bottlenose and common), four kinds of turtle, the endangered dugong, and over 2000 fish species. The archipelago's human population is estimated as 2697 (1995 figures), divided into 580 families.

Most of the archipelago was declared a National Park in 1971. This encompassed the southern islands of Benguerua, Magarouk and Bangué, while Bazaruto and Santa Carolina were declared Surveillance Zones. But it was not until 1989 towards the end of the Mozambican war that the Park authorities established themselves in any meaningful way.

In the same year, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) began working in the area. They hoped to increase the National Park to include the whole archipelago, feeling that by far the best way to conserve it was to treat it as an integrated system which would take into account the interdependence of the islands and the mainland as well as the needs of both the indigenous people and the natural resources.

They conceived and implemented a comprehensive, long-term plan for conserving and developing it, and appointed several 'Guardas de Fauna' or 'wildlife guards', people from the community whose mission was to inform and educate local people about conservation.

Fishing has, at least until recently, been the main source of income for over 70% of the local community. Sheila Ramsay, a social scientist who worked in the area for years, wrote in 1995 that although the islanders were relatively poor in material terms, they were highly skilled as fishermen, and experienced traders, with a stable and strong society and culture and "a robust economy based on a successful trade in marine resources."

Since the 1950s, tourism has also been a significant part of the area's economy. By 1998, six tourism concessions had been granted over four of the islands. The same year, Antonio Reina of the Endangered Wildlife Trust in Maputo, warned at an international symposium that "although tourism is usually perceived as having great economic value for the local people, in Bazaruto

tourism and artisanal fishing must be complementary industries. The financial success of both the tourism and artisanal fishing on the islands is crucial to the conservation of the Bazaruto Archipelago in the long term."

At the same time, the WWF noted that the area was fast becoming a hotspot for eco-adventurers eager for remote destinations, and they saw this as a threat to the islands. A 1998 report says "pressure is increasing to allow more tourism developments in the archipelago."

It seems that the area has now given way to that pressure. When I visited in June 2001, at least three new major commercial developments were under way. One is Jordan Properties' 30 000-ha Vilanculos Coastal Wildlife Sanctuary. It covers the San Sebastiao Peninsula and two islands, Lenene and Chilonzwini, and is, according to the press release, "a low-density ecotourism venture....consisting of 50 stands and a small, up-market boutique-style commercial lodge." The South African company plans to introduce the "big five" into parts of the sanctuary.

At the same time, Lenene Island Resort, a company owned by two South Africans and Mozambican Filipe Chibale, were also busy developing the uninhabited, 200-ha Lenene. Chibale told me he'd been advised that the island couldn't accommodate another project (other than Chibale's, he implied), but that both developments were going ahead. "I'm not interested in what they're doing", said Chibale.

On Bazaruto, Indigo Bay was being developed by the Mantis Collection, also South African. The company has won World Travel Awards for the last four years running, including the coveted prizes for World's Leading Conservation Company and the World's Leading Safari and Game Reserve. The Mantis Collection is so named to "honour the bushmen, San and all the early people who revered the earth and served each other with true humanity and humility. An example all of us in the modern world would do well to emulate."

All of the developers boast of how pristine the areas are. All of them claim the developments will benefit the locals and the environment, and that the local people were consulted at every step. And they all speak of their projects in terms of "ecotourism".

Pristine? Not any more. The Indigo Bay development, for example, which has since been opened, offers waterskiing, knee boarding and "doughnut'ing"; as well as horse-riding and guided island drives. It consists of 23 beach chalets, each one air-conditioned, with en suite shower, mini-bar, 24 hour power and satellite TV. The resort features a rim-flow swimming pool, and a PlayStation for children. Environmental consultant Paul Dutton noted in a letter to the Secretariat for Eastern African Coastal Area Management (SEACAM) that a vital protective beach-rock reef was being removed at Indigo Bay for the comfort of bathing tourists, and that wetland was being drained through canalisation.

Dutton also noted in his letter to SEACAM that Jordan Properties' concession area was totally unsuited for the "big five", a sentiment echoed by representatives of the Endangered Wildlife Trust in Maputo. He objected strongly to a proposal by the company to excise the tiny Bangué Island from the reserve, and develop it.

Jordan Properties boasts that their sanctuary is part of a World Heritage Site, although when I asked the World Heritage Centre, a spokesperson said that it is not yet inscribed in the World Heritage List. "The World Heritage Centre has been working with the Mozambican authorities in preparing the nomination file for the site". At least one member of Jordan Properties must have

known this: Mozambican Minister of Environment John Kachamila is a 25% shareholder. The spokesperson said the Centre was unaware of the developments.

How will locals benefit? When I asked Filipe Chibale, he said, "later on, when we have made some money back, we will be building a shop on the island". Jordan Properties has undertaken to construct a school. They all say the locals will get jobs.

Rui Nyantumbu of the WWF in Vilanculos says that the new tourist developments affect the area and the local community in both positive and negative ways. But he has, as it turns out, few positive things to say. "They're getting jobs, and development in the area. But they are changing basic ways of life."

He indicates that the issue of jobs is complicated. Firstly, most of the labour on the islands is imported ("they say local labour lacks the skills"), and certainly people at management level are foreigners. And wherever labour comes from, an estimated 2.6 workers per tourist bed staying permanently on the islands put the islands themselves at risk. The infrastructure needed to support them fuel, waste disposal, water, sewage will mean that the islands will no longer be self sustaining.

Secondly, it's not at all clear that the people want the kinds of jobs on offer. "Most of the people here" Nyantumbu says, "are fishermen. But there's a new policy implemented this year regarding the peninsula and the islands that says nobody can fish in certain areas. There's a "sanctuary", and nobody can fish around there. People who used to fish on the coastline have to stop, or they have to go to high sea. And they don't have the means to go to high sea; their boats aren't right for that. So they have no choice but to turn themselves into guards or whatever."

And as for the shop and the school, Antonio Reina scoffs. "That's nothing," he says. "This kind of thing needs a process, not just actions. They should say, during the next 50 years we are going to do this, this, this and that. They need to start working in communities sustainably, over quite a long period of time."

On the question of consultation before Jordan Property's sanctuary was declared, Nyantumbu says he's unaware of it. "You can see that the locals are not happy; they're asking how they are going to live, with 30 000 hectares that you can no longer set foot in to fish, because it's a sanctuary." What's more, he says that the sanctuary has nothing to do with preserving animals. "The problem is, they don't want those [local] people there. They want the area to be reserved for tourists." According to an article published in the Mail & Guardian in September, the sanctuary will displace 18 long-established communities with at least 1000 members removed.

In an interview in June, Antonio Reina pointed out that it's not enough for them to claim to have consulted with local people; there are many other stakeholders most notably, the WWF and the National Park, but also other tourist operators in the area. He said that neither his organisation nor the WWF had had any official communication from any of the developers.

Nyantumbu of the WWF says: "People say we have to preserve the islands, but for whom? These are our islands. We are Mozambicans, where do we get \$100 or \$150 to go there? The islands shouldn't be only for rich people. They are reserving the best areas for foreigners. I'll tell my child we have dugongs, turtles, and dolphins but I won't be able to show them to him".

Have the locals benefited from tourism in the area in the past? Tourists improve trade for sellers although South Africans, who are the most common tourists there, are notorious for entering Mozambique fully stocked with everything from tinned food to toilet paper. Money can also be made transporting tourists from the mainland to the reefs and islands and back. For a time, the lodge operators paid the community a fee for each tourist staying at their lodge, but this practice has now stopped. The backpackers' centre I stayed at on the mainland was owned by a South African and a Moroccan, and run by a Zimbabwean and his South African wife. They warned me not to trust local operators, describing them as "shifty". The barman was British. There were about three down-trodden looking Mozambicans constructing new rondavels, and a small Mozambican boy of about ten, Pedro, who did odd jobs, and was constantly shouted at by the manager. When I asked him how much he was being paid he said he didn't know, he hadn't been paid yet. He said he'd been working there for about six months. And Nyantumbu says if you could find a lodge in Vilanculos where 20% of the income stays in the area you'd be lucky.

Mozambique and the International Year of Ecotourism

Several hundred kilometres south, in Maputo, the first of the WTO-OMT's regional seminars in preparation for the International Year of Ecotourism was held in March.

In its follow-up report, the WTO-OMT concludes by saying, "the potential of ecotourism to benefit local communities and conservation is being recognised in Africa and there is enthusiasm for it....Ecotourism is an important mechanism for realising an income for local communities from their natural and cultural capital, and for the conservation of those resources....2002 presents an excellent platform to display Africa's success stories. Africa's enthusiasm for ecotourism needs to be communicated [at the World Ecotourism Summit] in Quebec in 2002."

Tourism has been actively promoted by the United Nations as a development strategy in Mozambique for some time now. The opening up of the industry to foreign investors has been included in its Structural Adjustment Programme, and the government has committed itself to removing obstacles and speeding up the process of tourism development, and making sure foreign tourists have easy access to the country.

In an article in Business Day Mozambican Tourism Minister Fernando Sumbana Jnr is reported as saying that the government is looking to develop the Vilanculos Coastal Wildlife Sanctuary as a model for future projects along the same lines.

In the context of development, it is worth noting the observations of Sheila Ramsay in her 1995 discussion of ecotourism in the Bazaruto area. She said that one should look further than the generation of wealth and possessions when assessing quality of life; that happiness has much more to do with marriage, work, leisure and friendships. This is almost always overlooked in development discourse, as is the fact that many subsistence economies are thriving, productive, and sustainable.

Problems of Definitions

A big part of the problem is the fact that the term "ecotourism" is flexible to the extent that it has no content, allowing just about anybody to use the label, and making it dangerous to promote. While its first tenet was originally to "take only photographs and leave only footprints", ecotourism today often simply denotes a holiday in a natural environment.

The WTO-OMT acknowledges this lack of consensus. It does not have a formal definition of its own, but does have a list of "general characteristics", which are in line with the definition of the International Ecotourism Society (TIES) a definition which the US-based Rethinking Tourism Project (RTP) says has been repeatedly rejected by indigenous people. The WTO-OMT's "characteristics" foreground the experience of tourists rather than host communities ("All nature-based forms of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas".) As far as local participation goes, ecotourism "supports the protection of natural areas by generating economic benefits" and "providing alternative employment and income opportunities" for host communities. UNEP's "basic elements" go a little further, by including "local participation, ownership and business opportunities".

Meanwhile, an alternative definition developed by several NGOs, indigenous organisations and trade unions at a UN conference has been pointedly ignored by the WTO-OMT. This definition explicitly includes the rights of indigenous people to say "no" to tourism development, and promotes processes for them to control and maintain their resources. It also stresses "equal, effective and active participation of all stakeholders". Recently, UNEP officially acknowledged this; not as a definition, but as a statement of genuine concern from primary stakeholders.

In Costa Rica, where both golf tourism and ecotourism are big, "ecogolf" is now being marketed: basically, golf played on a course built in an (otherwise) untouched environment. Similarly, the WTO-OMT's concept of ecotourism seems nothing more than a convenience, born of the fact that (after terrorism) both environmental politics and tourism are at the top of the world agenda. While there are, of course, many examples of "good" ecotourism, the WTO-OMT's concept of it seriously undermines them.

Ecotourism - Who Profits?

Ecotourism is promoted by the United Nations and its organs as a sustainable development tool, and a solution to poverty. It does generate jobs and income, and can provide business opportunities in host communities. There's no doubt that tourism is a big money-spinner but who really profits?

The economics of tourism has a lot to do with General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), an international trade agreement that acts as a legal and operational framework for the gradual elimination of barriers to international trade in services. Where tourism is concerned, the ostensible aim of GATS is the stimulation of the tourism industry by making conditions favourable for foreign investment.

GATS removes restrictions on the right of foreign companies to transfer staff from one country to another, and allows them to send profit earned in the host country to the mother company abroad. Under GATS, government protection of the local tourism industry is considered unfair practice. At the same time, the Agreement on Trade-Related Investment Measures (TRIMS) removes the requirement for foreign companies to use local input.

It is in this economic context that the UN, and the World Tourism Organisation (WTO-OMT) in particular, are encouraging so-called developing countries to open themselves up to foreign investment in tourism, especially ecotourism. At the 2001 UN Conference on Least Developed Countries, tourism was included on the conference's agenda for the first time. WTO-OMT Secretary General Francesco Frangialli held that tourism can be a valuable tool in the

international fight to alleviate poverty, saying also that tourism receipts contributed to balance of payments and to reducing external debt (some critics have dubbed this a debt-for-nature swap). Deregulation and privatisation of the tourism industry is also included in the Structural Adjustment Programmes of many countries.

In these conditions it's easy for foreign investors with hard currency and the ability to market, to capitalise on the tourism potential of poorer, less developed countries. In Belize, one of the world's top ecotourism destinations, despite its government's attempts to promote locally-run tourism ventures, an estimated 90% of the coastal development is in foreign hands, and the situation is similar in much of the developing world.

Although this is lost in the WTO-OMT's rhetoric of best practices and sustainable development, it has been raised by a sister agency, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). In a report published in March 2001 UNCTAD says that tourism is a sector in which "there is clearly an uneven distribution of benefits, which is threatening the social, economic and environmental sustainability of tourism in some developing countries."

It identifies leakages as a big issue ("the process whereby part of the foreign exchange earnings generated by tourism, rather than being retained by the tourist-receiving countries, is either retained by tourist-generating countries or repatriated to them in the form of profits, income, or royalty remittances, repayment of foreign loans, and imports of equipment, materials, capital and consumer goods.") It said that these outflows can "significantly neutralise the positive financial effects of international tourism."

According to the report, the average leakage for smaller developing economies is between 40 and 50% of gross tourism incomes. These countries tend to be just right for ecotourism, being less developed and therefore more "unspoilt" than the developed West. What they lack in infrastructure they make up for in pristine coastlines, a favourable exchange rate, and appealing investment regulations.

A second (and related) issue identified by UNCTAD is the anti-competitive, or predatory, behaviour of big companies. According to the report, this deepens unbalanced trade benefits from tourism, and increases the leakage effect, thus threatening the benefits that tourism liberalisation can bring to developing nations. Anti-competitiveness is a practice that developing nations are largely unable to deal with or prevent; nor does the GATS framework provide mechanisms to control it.

While tourism often improves life for poor communities in the short term, one of the dangers of using it as a development strategy is that it promotes reliance on fickle buyers. It changes local economies by displacing activities that help a community to be self-sufficient, like food production. Then, when a destination is no longer fashionable, or when there is political instability or a natural disaster, the tourists and the tourism industry move on elsewhere. This is particularly true of ecotourism, which targets mainly rural communities.

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CLEARINGHOUSE FOR REVIEWING ECOTOURISM, No. 19 UN 'INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF ECOTOURISM 2002' IN A DEEP MUDDLE - SCRAP IT!

The highly controversial UN-initiated International Year of Ecotourism (IYE) 2002 started on 1 January. For over a year, NGOs, people's organizations, indigenous peoples groups and concerned citizens - many of them from the South - have repeatedly expressed grave worries about the UN programme in statements and letters to UN General Secretary Kofi Annan and the IYE organizing agencies, UNEP and the World Tourism Organization (WTO-OMT).

There is clear evidence that ecotourism worldwide has become a form of development aggression that often involves environmental destruction, plundering of biological resources, disruption of community life, forceful removal of residents from their homes and lands and discrimination against local and indigenous peoples. Thus, a global citizens movement has emerged to oppose the IYE that promotes ecotourism as a viable tool for "sustainable development and the conservation of natural and cultural resources".

Unfortunately, efforts by civil society to redirect the IYE to make it a "Reviewing" event to properly and comprehensively examine and tackle the many serious problems inherent in ecotourism have not really been successful. On the other hand, the IYE organizers have failed to rally public support for their disputed programme, and preparations have become increasingly isolated.

Most importantly, the gloomy prospects for world peace and economic stability in the wake of the September 11 attacks in the United States will most likely result in a further decline of interest in ecotourism and, thus, the IYE, as tourists are changing their behaviour, and governments, industry and other parties concerned with tourism are shifting their activities and resources to other areas.

Therefore, we have come to the realization that this highly ill-conceived and untimely IYE programme should be abandoned. Instead, concerted efforts need to be made to examine the sustainability of tourism as a whole, particularly in view of the "new world disorder" that causes profound changes in the international travel and tourism industry, with unforeseeable impacts on societies and the environment.

OPPORTUNITIES LOST

Although our campaign to refocus and rename the UN programme to "International Year of REVIEWING Ecotourism" has given impetus for a more comprehensive and meaningful public debate on ecotourism issues, our hopes to foster a constructive dialogue with the inter-governmental agencies in charge of the IYE have largely remained unfulfilled. What has been actually done to reframe the programme is too little and too late.

While it is true, that the IYE organizers have, at least rhetorically, picked up on some of our ideas, it is important to note that there has been no consultation on how our proposals can translate into action in an open and fair way. For this and other reasons, we feel there is a trend to co-opt and distort the inputs of NGOs' and people's organizations so that these fit into the strategy of a handful of influential ecotourism lobbyists who are firmly holding grip on the content and process of the IYE that reflect narrow interests.

The Review - one of our main demands - appears to have become the new buzzword of the IYE. But without a thorough discussion with all concerned parties - particularly local communities and indigenous peoples as major rights-holders - on the process, the content and goals, it has a hollow clang of an empty bucket.

Indeed, there is little evidence that UNEP and WTO-OMT are even prepared to seriously forge a sincere and impartial Review because of the clear lack of interaction with concerned organizations, community groups and citizens who are documenting and monitoring local developments and seeking for genuine solutions based on the principles of political and economic equity, social justice, cultural integrity and ecological sustainability.

Meanwhile, despite the IYE's organizers' verbal commitments not to support the promotion of ecotourism without "a thorough and inclusive process of reviewing" , all the reports and programmes of the regional preparatory conferences organized by WTO-OMT and UNEP as part of the IYE suggest that promotional and marketing aspects are still taking precedence over holistic and critical representations of ecotourism.

A recent workshop held in New Delhi - organized by two NGOs from Germany and India and sponsored by the German Environment Ministry and UNEP - could have been a good opportunity to work towards more transparency and participation in the IYE process. While the meeting clearly focussed on a discussion of global guidelines for sustainable tourism under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), UNEP's tourism programme coordinator also gave a presentation on the IYE, and NGOs from the South and the North had the chance to respond directly. However, the way UNEP has since then attempted to turn the meeting into an official IYE preparatory event is extremely disturbing. UNEP even produced a report that gives the impression that the workshop, organized by NGOs for NGOs, was a UNEP consultation and the main theme was the IYE, which is far from the truth. In our view, this incident clearly reflects UNEP's unfortunate attitude towards NGOs on this issue and an ethically questionable method to purportedly draw free and independent groups into the IYE process. We welcome efforts by UNEP to integrate perspectives of NGOs and community organizations into any official process, but are disturbed by the treatment of the New Delhi workshop.

We understand that the IYE organizers are in a desperate position to seek recognition for their programme and therefore want to demonstrate that the IYE has become much more inclusive and participatory and successfully incorporated civil society initiatives. But for us, "inclusion" must never take place without the full consensus of the concerned actors, and sponsoring agencies have no right to claim ownership of and misrepresent events they financially support.

LACK OF SUPPORT

By mishandling the programme, the IYE organizers have manoeuvred themselves into greater isolation, and preparations have become more muddled and less transparent, with only a selected few "stakeholders" participating.

As regards NGO engagement, one of the greatest ironies and a major cause of contention is that exactly those large international and North-based organizations that have been strongly criticized for ignoring local people's rights and needs have been allowed to play a key role in the IYE and are clearly privileged by donor agencies to proceed with their IYE-related activities. In view of the growing controversy, however, several NGOs, who were originally undecided, have stayed away from the IYE and some of them even joined the campaign against the official IYE.

Indigenous Peoples and their support groups are also increasingly appalled as to how their rights, values and interests have been ignored. In a recent statement to the Seventh Session of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) under the Convention of Biological Diversity, indigenous peoples representatives reiterated their position: "...it is very disturbing that the UN International Year of Ecotourism (IYE) in 2002 has been approved, with the explicit mandate of promoting ecotourism... Ecotourism is particularly damaging to Indigenous Peoples, who have maintained high biological diversity within their traditional territory over generations and millenia; their homelands and cultures are now the prime target globally for rapid commercialization and exploitation by the ecotourism industry."

Many groups and individuals, who have shown an interest in ecotourism and the IYE, have vocally complained about the "closed-door" nature of the IYE. Indeed, the IYE organizers have hardly done anything to provide the public with detailed and realistic information and a clearer perspective on the issues under discussion.

The information given on the WTO-OMT website and UNEP's Manual for the IYE reveals that the programme is almost exclusively about holding conferences, which are known to be out of reach for the majority of concerned and interested parties and rarely subjected to public scrutiny.

For instance, a participant of the IYE2002 online forum run by planeta.com recently wrote in reply to a posting by WTO-OMT regarding the preparatory conference in Brazil: "The meeting was open ONLY for those who could afford the ticket. Attendance would cost between \$1500-3000! Fine if [the] Ford [Foundation] is buying your ticket or you have friends in a Washington NGOs, but for the rest of us?" (spelling mistakes removed).

Although the meetings initiated by the International Ecotourism Society (TIES) in cooperation with UNEP are less extravagant and expensive than those of WTO-OMT, representatives of poor rural and indigenous communities and local organizations working for social and environmental justice will also be excluded from the Southeast Asia meeting for the IYE in Chiang Mai, Thailand, next March, because of prohibitively high prices for travel, accommodation, registration fee, and related training and ecotour-programmes. Since we are told there is only a "small fund" available to cover participants' expenses, it will be - as so often before - dominated by foreign "experts" and some local ecotourism planners and practitioners who can afford to pay. In conclusion, this series of IYE-related meetings look more like business ventures catering to rich conference tourists from the North and local elites, rather than an opportunity for meaningful knowledge sharing and education, involving local disadvantaged groups.

Responses to our Clearinghouse for REVIEWING Ecotourism reveal that there is increasing disillusionment among people - including students, academics, writers, and even ecotourism consultants and practitioners -, who earlier had good faith in the benefits of ecotourism. There is also the observation that the media are increasingly alerted to the IYE controversy and present critical views on ecotourism issues.

END OF THE ECOTOURISM HYPE

The glossy brochure published by the organizers of the World Ecotourism Summit - the main event of the IYE - stresses the growing importance of ecotourism and boasts its great potential for economic development.

However, there is increasing acknowledgement that the growth rates and the demand for ecotourism have been vastly exaggerated. While WTO-OMT and other promoters had put forward estimates that ecotourism made up 20 per cent of the total tourism business - probably to attract private investments and funding for projects from donor agencies -, recent market research reveals that the projected growth rates in ecotourism of approximately 20 per cent have not realized, and merely 3-5 per cent of the international tourism market can be accounted to this niche market, according to the latest statistics.

In the light of this, it is not surprising that at the WTO-OMT-organized IYE preparatory conference in Austria last September, the European Union representative, Reinhard Klein, clearly pointed out in his speech, "Ecotourism is no topic for the policy of the European Union".

The corporate world considered ecotourism as a lucrative business as long it was "trendy" and offered companies an opportunity to "green-wash" their unsustainable tourism activities. But there has been a drastical change, and the tourism industry is known for its quick responses to market fluctuations. It is after all a lifestyle industry. The growing realization about the lack of economic viability in combination with the rapidly declining image of ecotourism may be an explanation as to why the business sector - contrary to our expectations - has kept a very low profile in the IYE. Instead, the big industry associations such as the WTO-OMT Business Council and the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) are focussing their activities on "sustainable tourism" at the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in September of this year.

IYE AFTER SEPTEMBER 11

The UN programme has been in trouble from the very beginning; but in the wake of the September 11 attacks and the looming "global war against terrorism", the IYE may be dead on arrival. The knock-out of the airline industry and the volatile geo-political situation accompanied by a deepening global economic crisis have already shown an immense ripple effect on tourism, which of course includes ecotourism. Events on September 11 have exacerbated the industry's crisis.

The WTO-OMT's Market Intelligence and Promotion Section released a report on September 18, admitting that the September events had a more severe impact on travel and tourism than any other crisis in the past and "the situation is exceptional". Both business and leisure travel have dropped sharply since September, with cancellations of bookings around the world between 20 and 30 per cent. Travel to some countries with large Muslim populations has even plummeted by 60 to 70 per cent. A whole range of tourism-related services have been thrown into an unprecedented crisis, including airlines, hotels, cruiselines, tour operators, transport companies such as car rentals, organizers of conferences, trade fairs and sports events, the food service and entertainment industry.

If the WTTC statistics can be trusted, in case of only a 10 per cent decline of international tourism, almost 9 million jobs will be lost worldwide. But these figures probably do not include the millions of jobs in the informal tourism sector, and the losses for local communities that are eking out a living from tourism may be immeasurable.

The WTO-OMT and a report prepared for the Pacific Asia Travel Association have identified three main factors that may wreak havoc to the tourism industry for years to come: Firstly, the lack of consumer confidence in the safety of air travel; secondly, the overall uncertain world

situation, including the possibility of armed conflicts, civil unrest and insecurity at home and in tourist destinations; and thirdly, the weakening of the global economy, which already affected travel and tourism before September.

In this situation, countries are making all-out efforts to ensure the economic survival of their tourist industries and to adjust their marketing strategies. In addition, governments are spending huge amounts of public money to beef up security and safety, to subsidize crisis-struck businesses as well as for promotional campaigns to get people travelling again. For instance, only a few days after September 11, the US federal government approved US\$5 billion in cash and US\$10 billion in loan guarantees for American airlines. Not enough, US airline companies additionally asked to postpone paying some US\$4 billion in taxes until January. According to an ABC News report, some US congressmen and senators even called on the federal government to subsidize up to US\$500 of personal travel for every American through the end of 2002.

Naturally, there is now much less interest in ecotourism and the IYE than anticipated. We can expect that this will also have a significant impact on the funding decisions by governments, development aid agencies, financial institutions and the private sector and that budgets for social and environmental components in tourism-related projects will shrink substantially.

Rather than visiting remote and unknown places to enjoy nature, "exotic" cultures, and adventure, tourists, if travelling at all, will most likely resort to "risk-free" holiday-destinations, preferable in their countries and regions. Tourism authorities and industry have rushed to come up with new marketing schemes that promote destinations as "safe havens" for visitors.

It is well-known that tourism is one of the most fragile industries, and we have experienced again and again as to how local communities relying on tourism activities have been pushed into economic despair as a result of political instability (e.g. the 1991 Gulf War), economic downturns (the Asian crisis that started in 1997), natural disasters (Southeast Asian haze in 1997), diseases and other unexpected happenings. In view of the predictably bleak future for travel and tourism, the IYE is likely to contribute to an unhealthy oversupply of ecotourism infrastructure and products because it encourages governments, local communities and the private sector around the world to get involved in related projects.

Local communities and businesses in the Third World, who have always been at the bottom of the international tourism system's hierarchy and forced to sell their services under value, are now losing out even more, also because large tourism corporations from developed countries are coercing providers in developing countries to greater price-cuttings in order to reduce their costs and to give incentives to tourists in these times of crisis.

The structural violence associated with unjust and destructive tourism development that often results in serious conflicts in local situations must not be underestimated. In this context, we should heed the words of Klaus Toepfer, the UNEP's Executive Director, who recently urged to fight the root causes of poverty and civil unrest. Just 10 days after the September attacks, he warned at a launch of a regional environmental action plan in Kazakhstan:

"When people are denied access to clean water, soil and air to meet their basic human needs, we see the rise of poverty, ill-health and a sense of hopelessness. Desperate people can resort to desperate solutions....What happened in the United States was a crime against humanity, an act of horrendous violence against all races and creeds. But we must also expose the forces that create poverty, intolerance, hatred and environmental degradation that can lead to an unstable world."

He added the rise of globalization and its impacts on global trade patterns was also a key issue that the international community must face up to.

Therefore, it is important that the agencies in charge of the IYE, and other international bodies, eventually recognize the realities and act responsibly. Ecotourism is a barrier, rather than a viable tool for poverty alleviation and sustainable development. It must no longer be denied that related projects in the Third World have engendered incredible human hardship and misery and subsequently provoked countless local protests, with a number of them ending in violence.

Particularly in the context of globalization with its "free market" driven liberalization, ecotourism schemes around the world have not only aggravated environmental problems but also facilitated the corporate take-over and sale-out of nature, cultures and peoples, exacerbated inequities and injustices, and undermined people's rights and aspirations for sovereignty and self-determined, environmentally sound development.

CONCLUSION

All that said, a celebration of the IYE appears to be an even greater folly than before. The IYE has been unacceptable from the start and now it has ended up in a hopeless mess. So let's scrap it! In view of the highly precarious situation, there is no point to argue "The show must go on", and to sacrifice common sense and waste scarce resources in order to save this ill-guided and untimely IYE programme at all costs.

We do not need the IYE to further the debate on ecotourism-related issues and seek for realistic solutions. The idea to set up a separate structure around the IYE to specifically deal with ecotourism makes little sense anyway, especially in view of the fact that its significance has been highly overrated and has even declined. We strongly believe, it is more important to integrate the discussions on these issues in processes such as the Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD), which take a more broad-based approach to sustainable development within which tourism can then be properly assessed. This way, we can also avoid an unnecessary fragmentation of the tourism debate, and it is easier to tackle the great challenges that have emerged since September.

Given that the IYE process has been far from giving sufficient space to all parties, particularly local and indigenous peoples voices, it is also more advantageous to focus on other multi-stakeholder processes, particularly the CSD, which are more democratic and open to a wider spectrum of civil society, including NGOs, community and indigenous peoples' organizations, women's groups, youth groups, trade unions and research institutions.

Since we are shifting our campaign from Reviewing Ecotourism to broader issues, we are in the process of expanding this information service to "Clearinghouse for REVIEWING Tourism" with ecotourism as one component.

The campaign coordinating groups:

Third World Network

Tourism Investigation & Monitoring Team (t.i.m.-team), Thailand

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM), Malaysia

Consumers Association of Penang (CAP), Malaysia