

CLIMATE CHANGE REAFFIRMS THE NEED FOR A CHANGE IN MENTALITY AND ATTITUDES

A change in mentality and attitudes was the most frequently heard expression during the symposium on Prevention of Natural Disasters, How to Face Climatic Change, held on the occasion of the XXXV Annual Meeting of the Interciencia Association, which took place for the first time in Bolivia, organized jointly with the *Asociación Boliviana para el Avance de la Ciencia* (ABAC) and the Vice-Ministry of Science and Technology, who chose the topic. Interciencia's summoning power permitted the gathering of a select group of scientists specialized in several disciplines related to the subject from the Americas, from other Continents, and from Bolivian Ministries, the industry and the universities.

The conclusions and recommendations have been synthesized in the Declaration of Cochabamba, published in the present issue of *Interciencia*, which reminds each one that the concrete actions to take care of our planet are not feasible without solidarity and equity among human beings, principally with those who live in poverty and indigence.

The tragic procession of maladies that appear as effects of the climate change are already evident, such as the increase of malaria in the Andean *Altiplano*, the disappearance of glaciers accompanied by drought in several areas and persistent inundations in others, as well as the limited access to quality water and fertile land.

It is thus necessary to re-define the concept of development: ethics with humanism characterized by spiritual values that transcend any solution. We must emphasize the need to search the complementarities between the modern scientific knowledge and the ancestral knowledge of the indigenous native peoples and farmers. On the other hand, the participation of scientists of the region, local infrastructures and the access to international mastery are all required to make available to countries, mainly the weakest, the knowledge, the efficient and effective technologies, both locally and globally.

The Interciencia Association agrees with the recommendation of creating a unique empowered source on climatic information, particularly due to the fact that the strongest intersection between the human decision making and environmental stress is at a regional or local level (Barron EJ, 2009; *Science* 326: 643). Then, the proposal of investing in

new centers of excellence (Bierbaum RM and Zoellick RB, 2009, *Science* 326: 771) in order to create capacities, to offer educational programs, technologies and management training, should also be implemented regionally and locally. The obvious places will be the vulnerable areas such as the Andean *Altiplano*, the Caribbean and Central America.

The next decade will be that of the application of clean and renewable energies, a field where many countries in the Americas are called to have an important role. We highlight the case of Bolivia, which should enter into a new era through the intelligent use of its energetic potential, particularly that treasured in the *Salar de Uyuni*, which could become the largest laboratory for the applications of energies: solar, eolic, geothermal and lithium batteries. This country could realize a quantum leap towards a post-industrial society without having to pay the heavy environmental and social costs of the industrial economies. On their part, the Indian people, owner of the *Salar de Uyuni*, could provide a historical contribution to the planet.

The participants in the symposium held in Cochabamba insisted in that the scientific community also possesses the key to the future, providing high quality education in science and technology. "The hope resides in the intervention of youth that should achieve a complete and active knowledge of the coming risks for the future of the planet". This generation and the coming ones will suffer for not paying attention to today's signals. Youth has to start now to influence governments.

Finally, we shall recall with satisfaction that from space-ships, astronauts admire the phosphorescence of the *Salar de Uyuni* when the American Continent is in darkness. More than a geographical signal, Uyuni could become a lighthouse, a symbol of this new era of the clean and renewable energies to turn our planet into an environment full of health and bountiful for all its inhabitants.

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