

Human £\$Profit – Nature’s Loss: Counting the Decimation of Other Species in the 2030 Agenda

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The Conference of the Parties – Convention on Biodiversity – opening ceremony with former military general Al Sisi, now president of Egypt, taking on the next two years of Conference business ...

I am just returning from CoP 14 (Conference of the Parties), the 25th year of the *Convention on Biodiversity*, appropriately held in the militarized luxury desert resort of Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt. It's a three week global event where the 140+ UN states who signed up in the historic Agenda 21 Declaration in Rio in 1992 meet up bi-annually to discuss how it's all going. I have followed this from its very beginning, and will one day recount one of the most saddening and irresponsible stories of human greed and ignorance to my children, but that has to wait just a few years more ... now we stand at a threshold, a cliff edge on which the countless lives of thousands of species are on the brink of extinction. The age of the *Anthropocene* – the period of geological history where humans are the main cause of mass extinction - is now in full swing, and we, the axe-wielding monkeys in the sacred matrix of life, are hacking away at the very foundations of the earthly paradise we call our biosphere. There is still time to herd a few more animals into the Arc, but not very much, and how we do it in the confusion of globalisation is not so easy ...



It's a fair CoP ... Land use change brought about by corporates and government actions - ie business activities in national territories - will destroy up to 70% of species we know today.

5 Decades of Destruction

For those who are conscious of how rapidly nature has been eroded in the past 50 years we remember the 60's as the time when global environmental concerns either raised an eyebrow of green recognition in the urban masses, or the flower-power era of conscientious single-issue protests to save the trees, the whales, the birds and bees, etc. Right now, our generations are the unwitting(?) contributors and witnesses of accelerated destruction and fragmentation of precious pristine habitat alongside the slaughter of targeted, red-listed species.

Essentially, the entire 25 year old CoP process has been exactly this act of bearing witness instead of preventing the loss of species. In the first ten years after our nation states signed up to stop the loss, virtually nothing was done, and hardly any science had entered the discussion. The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg changed that, announcing the target of halting the loss of Biodiversity by the year 2012, with scientists climbing on board the sinking ship to measure and monitor the mass extinction. When governments failed to even reach a paper agreement on how to do that in a decade of talking, the Aichi Process agreed by the CoP then set a series of conservation targets for 2020, which is what this current CoP is measuring and monitoring, but not managing. And it is abundantly evident at this present conference that our governments will not meet these half measures once again. The case of Portugal's *National Biodiversity Strategy & Action Plan (NBSAP)*, issued 8 years late in May 2018, show just how far governments greenwash their policies, as the two key red-listed species in their responsibility– the Iberian Lynx and *Bonelli's* eagle, are not given a single mention in their whole plan,

and they trumpet the mantra of nature-based tourism as their key strategy for their widespread but abandoned, neglected and burnt out protected areas.

70% Species Loss will be the Cost

With previous estimates of 30 - 40% biodiversity loss on the table - amphibians are currently foreseen to be the most at risk as their decimation spreads on a global scale, epitomized in the near extinction of the iconic Golden Toad in South America - the only positive comment on this gathering is that it has pulled together the most impressive scientific envisioning of what we are doing to our planetary home and companion species, revealing a horror story that will haunt us forever. Within inner circles of non-public scientific knowledge, estimates are put as high as 70% of what we have at the moment, depending on what socio-economic scenarios are played out as our global population expands at first to 8 - 10 billion by 2030 – 2040, and over 11.4 billion in the post-2050 concrete jungles of ubiquitous human settlements, where pristine nature will be a historic memory, and wilderness confined to remote, inaccessible and uninhabitable terrain.

But population growth is just one of the drivers of the Anthropocene – the rapacious economic development model that underpins capitalist wealth accumulation and the elitist vision of the ‘affluent’ society has gained such international spread that no stone is left unturned in the quest for profit. The combination of capitalist expansion and population growth is nowhere so marked as South East Asia, currently home to more than half the planet, where greedy eyes foresee investment of an estimated \$25 trillion *extra* spend in infrastructure development by 2030 – a figure that excludes real estate investment. In concrete terms this means there are already plans for 3,700 large dam projects on the drawing board for 2030, and by 2050, the final embattled enclaves of mother nature will have a further 25 million km of new road lanes, forever fragmenting and scarring the remaining virgin land, paving the way for oil palm, rubber trees, tourism infrastructure, new urban settlement and vast corporate and governmental profits. A Tsunami of construction is coming, leaving no species untouched ...



The post-2020 strategy and the 2030 Agenda – ten years left to halt this horror

The post-2020 decade of action is now being prepared at this CoP (-out), and should be a telling tale for the 2030 Agenda which itself has stated 17 overarching sustainable development goals with 159 targets and indicators to stop the planetary rot. These laudable goals also have a tragic history of targets that were not met either at the Millennium turning point or at their 2015 revision date. Scenario planning allows us to believe there could be a way to avoid the drop, but most scenarios, however pessimistic, actually do not account for many of the likely extreme conditions we will encounter either as weather events, conflict and violence, social dislocation, financial turmoil or crop failure can create a Tsunami of socio-economic chaos that will batter the global economy, sending the poorest of its citizens over the brink in our lifetime.

20/20 vision Coral Reef Depletion highlighting the loss of biodiversity

Amidst the thousands of well-informed and active participants at CoP 14 there was a feeling of dogged campaigners preaching to an already converted audience, and those that need to be at the centre of the

discussion were notable by their absence. This was particularly true of the preceding Business and Biodiversity Forum, and WWF pointed to stakeholder engagement in biodiversity issues falling as low as 3% when it comes to donor agencies and corporates. In the main halls, an army of the Conventions' Secretariat and its member states were still bracketing and punctuating written commitments to shape what will clearly now be seen as another piece of rhetorical green washing of government and corporate activity for the final decade before the next (2030) deadline. It should not be too difficult to cross-reference IUCNs Red-listed species with the Worlds 30,000 designated conservation areas and make nations states and regions legally responsible for habitat management and protection, but as the case of Portugal shows, inter-governmental negotiation has mastered the art of removing the key details and generalising the solutions.

Taking Positive Actions

So where does that leave those who still believe that our children can enjoy what past generations have been able to use to enrich their life, instead of leaving them to inherit a hot, crowded, concrete monoculture and having to pay off the burden of economic, environmental and cultural indebtedness we place on them by our current cut-throat approach to material accumulation and mass consumption? Once again, it is easy to point out the problems but much harder to work out practical solutions. It will take a sea change at many levels in order to halt the loss of biodiversity in the next decade, or 'bend the curve' in the contemporary language of those in the know, but the single biggest change has to be in the value system of our collective consciousness, as the current awareness of the plastics issue proves.



Peace Park, Sharm el Sheik, A CoP14 feature with a message for the future

The move towards an ethical/sustainable/responsible system of consumption and production is the key practical implementation of this change (SDG 12). Behind this, an end to the low-level conflict-driven war economy (SDG16) with its essential demilitarization and peace dividend is a must. Addressing inequality and the needs of the poorest first is the priority (SDGs 1, 2) which must entail more equitable distribution of the global GDP (SDG 10), ie relieving the 1% of a just part of their accumulated fortunes, and taxing the stock exchanges and currency markets to release the funding that is so often quoted as the problem that hinders conservation. Breaking down the globally aggregated issues into local and



regional responsibilities is also a key feature of a realistic path to species and habitat survival.

Clearly these actions require an Olympic effort to save our natural environment before its becomes just a dinosaur memory in digital reality. Even those who do not believe in a conspiracy of international bankers and Big Brother government for the few can see the constant erosion of the natural resource base in favour of mass material gratification for the benefit of the super-affluent few through the wage enslavement of many.

Conference Information - An Impressive knowledge base is now available to 'bend the curve' of nature's loss

It is the people with these vested interests and the institutions they run that are the heartland of the

battlefield, which is why the original Agenda 21 put institutional transformation, now watered down to good governance, as the key to economic, environmental and cultural sustainability.

One Local-Global Sustainable Development Agenda

For biodiversity to survive the onslaught of humanity, there is an urgent need to define and design a local to global sustainable development agenda and ensure all sides fighting the short term political dogfight at the nation state level are voted in on the basis of their ability to implement such an agenda. The success of such work would halting the predicted loss of 7 out of 10 species - ' bend the curve' of biodiversity loss in the face of the human tsunami of planned construction that wipes them out. The national plans should be the empowering tools to give guidance to territorial and sectoral plans for avoiding negative impacts in infrastructure investment. Local and regional stakeholders can then be empowered and resourced to take up their role as true custodians of our natural heritage, thereby preserving the global matrix of biodiversity and the remaining paradise landscapes in an Agenda 2030 Noah's Arc of protected areas, buffer zones and connecting corridors we are still fortunate enough to enjoy, even in the madness of this modern world.



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