

Solomon Times Online

Monday, November 01, 2010 11:44 AM

Save the Pacific

BY PACIFIC REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

Press Release - "The loss of biodiversity is killing us, it's killing the rest of life and we're going to kill ourselves. If we continue down this path, we're going to make ourselves a world that will be very difficult to live in" - Pulitzer Prize winner Professor O E Wilson

A world-renowned biologist has called on world leaders to prioritise the plight of the Pacific islands; a region he said has been hardest hit by biodiversity loss and climate change.

The call comes from Pulitzer Prize winner for General Non-Fiction, Edward O Wilson, as the final week of the 10th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP10) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) gets underway in Nagoya, Japan.

A high-level delegation from the Pacific is among delegates from over 100 parties to the CBD negotiating a new framework for governments to combat biodiversity loss.

Professor Wilson, an acclaimed researcher, theorist, naturalist and a respected authority on biodiversity matters, said the world often ignores the Pacific islands.

"I think people should be more aware of what's happening to the Pacific Islands," he said. "There are entire nations that are under threat in ways most people simply don't understand."

Professor Wilson was speaking during a lecture at the Royal Botanical Gardens at Harvard University about the vast scope and importance of Earth's biodiversity. The lecture was delivered live via an interactive videoconference to Nagoya in order to minimise carbon footprint.

There are some very interesting cases in some of your countries," Professor Wilson told the Samoa Observer.

"There are islands such as Tuvalu and Kiribati who are in fact thinking about complete evacuation as their atoll land goes deeper and deeper under water."

Rising sea levels has made it necessary for people to relocate to higher grounds. But the Professor said this poses challenges for biodiversity.

"As people retreat back from the shoreline and then as they move inland, they are going to be taking down more of the national environment in the interior of the islands," he said. "I feel a very personal feeling for that because a lot of my early research was done in the islands. I have even done a study of the ants on your islands [Samoa]. I have considerable personal concern for the Pacific."

Professor Wilson said it is a grave injustice for world leaders to ignore what's happening in the Pacific.

"In the Pacific, we have people really directly affected," he said. "We should hear more about that. And so any kind of protest or intervention you can think of on their behalf and their biodiversity ought to be welcomed and paid attention to in the United Nations and elsewhere."

Professor Wilson's work has won a number of prestigious prizes in the sciences, including the U.S. National Medal of Sciences, the Crafoord Prize and the Audubon Medal.

A University Research Professor Emeritus at Harvard University, Wilson was named one of TIME magazine's 25 most influential people for his impassioned pleas to government and corporate leaders to address the damage to the planet.

In his book called *The Future of Life*, he wrote: "Now more than six billion people fill the world. The great majority are very poor; nearly one billion exist on the edge of starvation.

"All are struggling to raise the quality of their lives any way they can. That unfortunately includes the conversion of the surviving remnants of the natural environment. Half of the great tropical forests have been cleared.

"The last frontiers of the world are effectively gone.

"Species of plants and animals are disappearing a hundred or more times faster than before the coming of humanity, and as many as half may be gone by the end of this century. An Armageddon is approaching at the beginning of the third millennium.

"But it is not the cosmic war and fiery collapse of mankind foretold in sacred scripture. It is the wreckage of the planet by an exuberantly plentiful and ingenious humanity."

Professor Wilson said world leaders in Nagoya face a challenge that has perplexed policymakers for decades.

"We have to learn a lot, we have to learn it fast and we have to get across to our political leadership and public at large, people who are religious, people who are not religious, that this is urgent," he said.

"The loss of biodiversity is killing us, it's killing the rest of life and we're going to kill ourselves. If we continue down this path, we're going to make ourselves a world that will be very difficult to live in."

Professor Wilson said the solution lies between people and nature working together.

"The central problem is how to raise the poor to an endurable quality of life, preserving as much of the natural world as possible," he said during his lecture.

"What's the connection? Both the poor and biological diversity are concentrated in the developing countries, the poor countries where most of the people live.

"And the solution to the problem flows from the recognition that both depend on the other.

"The poor especially, nearly one billion in absolute poverty [as classified by the United Nations], absolutely destitute, they don't know where the next meal will come from, not having sanitation, not having easy access to clean water, they have little chance to improve their lives in a

devastated environment, the kind of environment we're creating. Conversely the national environment where most of the biodiversity is hanging on, these hotspots included, cannot survive the pressure of land hungry people who have nowhere else to go."

Humanity needs a new way of thinking about nature, he said.

"A global land ethic is urgently needed. Not just any land ethic that might happen to enjoy agreeable sentiment, but one based on the best understanding of ourselves and the world around us that science and technology can provide.

In his book, *The Future of Life*, he concluded: "Surely the rest of life matters. Surely our stewardship is its only hope. We will be wise to listen carefully to the heart, then act with rational intention and the tools we can gather and bring to bear."

Category: [Regional](#)

Topic: [Environment](#)

Source: http://www.sprep.org/article/news_detail.asp?id=842

Comments? Write a message to the Editor