



Pioneers of the Planet

Episode Two: Ahmed Djoghlaif

Madhyama Subramanian - Hello and welcome to another edition of pioneers of the planet coming to you from the UN Commission on Sustainable Development in New York. I am Madhyama Subramanian. What does it take to champion the cause of the environment? Is it easy to carry on when the road ahead looks bleak? How tough is it to push for change? That's what we'll try to find out on our show, Pioneers of the Planet. My guest for today is Dr Ahmed Djoghlaif; he is the Executive Secretary on the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Prior to this he was the Assistant to the Executive Director of UNEP. He has also been the director and co-ordinator of UNEP's division of the Global Environment Facility or GEF. During his tenure at the GEF, the portfolio grew from 6 projects worth \$28 million to 600 projects worth more than \$1 billion implemented in 155 countries. And prior to joining the United Nations, Dr Djoghlaif held a variety of important posts in the Algerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Welcome to the show, thank you for joining us. So where did your real interest in the environment begin?

Ahmed Djoghlaif – I think I started as a student of a PHD thesis on the new economic order in the beginning of the 1980's, as you know at that time, the need to change the rules of the economy was very high on the agenda of the international community and the UN in particular. So I prepared a PHD on the new economic orders, and it was obvious as a student that there was a need to reconstruct the basic foundation of the economy. I (then) had the pleasure and the honour to serve my country in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in the UN department(s), the economic and the social part of the UN (UNESCO), so I had attended a number of meetings of importance. It became clear very soon and especially in the context of the Bretton commission that the new economy and this new economic order that the countries, and especially those from the South, were advocating was sustainable development. We call it now sustainable development but it was the way our ancestors have always managed their relationship with nature; to take what we need without waste and to give back to nature what nature has given us as a legacy for

our children. I had the honour to be in New York, in our mission there, when the Secretary General of that time established this commission on development and environment and when the Bretton report was issued. And after that of course, I was elected as Rapporteur of the Preparatory Committee of free use. I had the honour for two years to be a member of a strong team with the Secretary General in Stockholm and after that at the Rio summit to prepare the Rio summit and I was also assisting my minister and we submitted the Rio report to the general assembly.

Madhyama Subramanian – That's a lot of experience and do you feel that somewhere along the way the word 'biodiversity' has gone out of the discussions and really today the focus is all on climate change, has it made things harder to champion the cause of biodiversity?

Ahmed Djoghlaif – Yes, because I think that if there is an awareness of the effects of climate change on the citizens of the world and the General Assembly, thanks to the leadership of the Secretary General has decided to have, for the second time, a general assembly debate on the effects of climate change before Copenhagen and we are now meeting on CSD and all the talk is on climate change, there is little attention from the public at large and the policy-makers on the impact of climate change on biodiversity, as you know deforestation contributes more than 20% of the CO₂ emission. And also the fact that biodiversity can contribute to climate change, because climate change is not only an energy issue, it's not just a technological issue, of course they have a role to play, but the environment a healthy ecosystem, a healthy forest, healthy oceans, healthy wetlands can make a very good contribution to a healthy atmosphere. But unfortunately the unprecedented loss of biodiversity, compounded by climate change, compounded by urbanisation, by land use and invasive species have minimised the capacity of the planet to contribute to re-creating a global atmosphere.

Madhyama Subramanian – So what do you think has gone wrong with people's approach to biodiversity.

Ahmed Djoghlaif - People are very close to nature, there is not a single community, a single traditional community, our ancestors who are not close to nature. All the religions, all the cultures of the world are linked to nature. But the urbanisation, I'm coming from Canada where the Secretary is there and there is a study that children

today are spending 30% less time outdoors and as you know, Canada is a great country, a very vast country, but the children are less and less linked to nature, due to urbanisation. So we are dealing (with this affect), we have developed an idea that the beauty and the wealth of the nature are granted forever. And we have made in our mind, a link between the Dollars and the Euros and the goods that nature provides. It's sufficient to have some paper, you to go to the supermarket, you pick up some potatoes, you find whatever you want but we have forgotten how nature is bringing this. So we have this relationship with nature and with urbanisation and with other areas and factors, that have 'de-linked' us from nature so we need to come back, we need to re-establish our relationship. And therefore we have a great programme in the vicinity, shall we call it a 'green wave' where we invite all the children of the schools of the world to unite at 10 o'clock on the International Day, on the 22nd of May, to establish a human chain of solidarity, between all the schools and to plant a tree. And as you know trees are the epitome of life on earth and this, as we say, is an educational programme so we are preparing the citizens of tomorrow, planting the seeds of nature in the mind, in the heart and in the soul of the next generation.

Madhyama Subramanian – What's the progress on meeting the biodiversity target on 2010? Are we there yet? What can we see?

Ahmed Djoghlaif – The international community and all the parties, so 190 world parties, have been requested to submit a national report on how they have implemented what we call the, Promise of our Heads of States in Johannesburg , where the heads of state have committed themselves to substantially reduce the rates of biodiversity loss by 2010. The European Union has decided to stop the loss of biodiversity in Europe by 2010.

Madhyama Subramanian – But have they really managed to do something about it?

Ahmed Djoghlaif – The report will tell us and there will be an assessment, an objective assessment, based on the national reports, so the governments will have to report on what they have done and this will be issued before the end of the year based on fact. But in Bonn in early March, we had a meeting, a high level panel, 50 experts and eminent persons and experts on biodiversity came together to asses and the conclusion is that we have failed as an international community.

Madhyama Subramanian – So what next?

Ahmed Djoghlaif – What next is, based on the lesson of this target, why we have failed. What we have learned and what are the possible successors, in Nagoya in Japan there will be a summit on biodiversity in October, where the international parties, the international communities, the family on biodiversity and the environmental family will decide on what should be the Nagoya biodiversity target, the post 2010 target, based on the experiences gained.

Madhyama Subramanian – What for you are the tough moments when you're having a negotiation on biodiversity?

Ahmed Djoghlaif – I think its always disheartening to see human beings, because I believe that we are all part of one family, we may be white, we may be black, we may be living in the East or in the West. We are all in the same boat, we have the same home; the planet. And there is no alternative, of course we can think of other alternatives but we have not, and so I think we have our destiny linked. And what is the disheartening issue, what I think will be the cement of humanity, which will bring us all together is because we have a common interest to protect life on earth and sometimes, due to mistrust, sometimes due to misunderstanding, sometimes based on alliances, I think this North-South divide, this East-West divide, this OECD divide, I think create unnecessary tension, mistrust, lack of confidence in the need to unite and work together for protecting life on earth and I think we owe it to ourselves and we owe it to our children.

Madhyama Subramanian – In your tenure at GEF, you really managed to increase the number of projects, the value of the projects and the number of places these projects were implemented. How did you manage to do that? And what were these about?

Ahmed Djoghlaif – I think the Secretary General of the United Nations always speaks off the staff as a capital, and I think the staff of any organisation, national or international, are the capital. I think we owe it to the team, a very hardworking team determined to put the environment and through it the UNEP on the top of the agenda and I think the trust of the parties, the trust of the government, decided to select

UNEP and to entrust UNEP with the responsibility of being an implementing agency in our project.

Madhyama Subramanian – And what did this huge scale up result in? Has it benefited the planet let's say?

Ahmed Djoghlaif – I think at every phase of the GEF they have an evaluation and this fourth phase is going through an evaluation, an independent evaluation on how the GEF project and not only the UNEP project but other executive agencies have made an impact. And the next assembly which I understand will be in Uruguay in 2010 will be seized by a report on how the portfolio of the GEF, which includes the portfolio of UNEP and other implementing agencies, have made an impact based on the policy recommendation that have been adopted in China in 2002 and in 2006.

Madhyama Subramanian – But are there any mistakes to learn from, during all these projects that were done? 600 projects?

Ahmed Djoghlaif - Yes I think that we do realise that in our rush to implement and to promote projects, we have made a number of mistakes, and one of the mistakes of course is the lack of sustainability of some projects. Due of course to lack of ownership and due to the lack of national resources to be invested. One project that I feel was an outstanding project was a partnership between Belgium and the GEF through UNEP, was to establish, to promote the implementation, in a synergetic manner, of the convention. Seen from the poverty alleviation with the establishment of joint secretariat, with the establishment of a joint bank of information and preparation of meetings before and after, co-ordination and also what we call the small grant programme of \$5,000, \$6,000. Of course it's a small amount from the Northern, the US standpoint, but from the South, the Mozambique standpoint and from other countries it's a huge amount of money that can make a difference and investing in this environment you don't need necessarily billions of dollars, small projects that make a difference. Small grants in order to promote poverty alleviation in the country. But when the GEF money finished, I think the project had to close and the experience gained was lost.

Madhyama Subramanian – So, in an ideal world, where everybody was listening to everyone, what would be the way you would want to preserve biodiversity? What would be the solution?

Ahmed Djoghlaif – I think it is what we are trying to achieve in the convention and particularly in our next meeting in Uruguay. I think this new phase, what we call the new enhanced phase of implementation, which started in Brazil, continued in Bonn and will culminate in Uruguay, through a summit.

Madhyama Subramanian – What is that process?

Ahmed Djoghlaif – The process is that the biodiversity environment should not be the exclusive domain of a ministry or of a small club of experts. We need to bring biodiversity and environment on the street and have the people engage, and have all the stakeholders engage. So we will have a summit on biodiversity because as you know all battles on the environment, be it climate, be it biodiversity, will be won or lost in the cities. So much of humanity will be living in cities and as you know this growth will be at the expense of natural habitat and therefore we need to bring biodiversity onto the top. So we will have a summit and without local authorities, without the mayors, we will fail to implement fully the convention at local level. The parliamentarian will have a summit with the globe on biodiversity. The youth, the women, the private sector, the scientific community. So bringing all these global alliances we will have the first global forum with private financing, with rich people who will make a contribution. So we need all the goodwill; the religious community, the NGO community, the indigenous community, the spiritual value of biodiversity, the cultural value, we are promoting also a programme on the link between cultural diversity and biodiversity to capture the heart, the soul, the value...

Madhyama Subramanian – So it's basically the partnerships that you are...

Ahmed Djoghlaif – Partnerships and commitment and every citizen in the world, we need to change our attitude towards nature, we need to be engaged because it's our life and the life of our children. You can't have the observer status and the status quo as it is. This crisis that we are seeing, the financial, the food, the energy, are just the symptoms of a bigger problem. And the bigger problem is the way that we have

managed our relationship with nature, we need to seize and we need to evolve into a different kind of relationship, where we use nature but we protect nature.

Madhyama Subramanian – Thank you so much Dr Djoghlafor for being with us on Pioneers of the Planet.

Ahmed Djoghlafor – Thank you very much for having me.