



## Press Release

---

November 17, 2009

### **DIALOGUE ON SOIL PROTECTION AND THE SUSTAINABLE USE OF SOILS**

On November 13<sup>th</sup> 2009, the Department of Sustainable Development of the Organization of American States (OAS-DSD) together with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Commission on Environmental Law, held a dialogue of experts on “Soil Protection and the Sustainable Use of Soils”.

The objective of the dialogue was to facilitate the exchange of experiences regarding the management and protection of soils around the world and to better understand available options to address the loss and degradation of natural formation, functions, and reduced capacity for carbon storage, among other soil-properties.

The dialogue brought together leading experts on soil protection, and representatives of governments, non-governmental organizations and academia. Participating experts included Mrs. Sheila Abed and Justice Antonio Benjamin, Chair and Deputy Chair of the IUCN Commission on Environmental Law, Dr. Ian Hannam, Chair of the Commissions Specialist Group on the Sustainable Use of Soils and Desertification and Mr. Bill Futrell, President of Sustainable Development Law Associates.

Due to the strong linkage between environmental and development issues, the experts agreed that the protection of soils is a priority in the sustainable development agenda. In this regard, they called for increased political commitment, financial support and hemispheric action on soil stewardship and land restoration. Furthermore, the experts emphasized the importance of protecting the soil as a natural resource, agreeing that legal frameworks should ensure that soils receive the same level of protection as other natural resources.

During the panel, experts also exchanged experiences regarding soil protection and its sustainable use in the Americas. In particular, Mrs. Claudia de Windt, Chief of the Division on Environmental Law, Policy and Good Governance of OAS-DSD shared pertinent experiences from the Americas and emphasized the need for identifying best practices and building capacity in the Hemisphere.

Justice Antonio Benjamin, of Brazil, enriched the discussion by highlighting key lessons from Brazil. Specifically, Justice Benjamin pointed to the importance of expanding upon the existing knowledge base and strengthening efforts to raise awareness on the scale and severity of soil degradation.

The DSD along with the IUCN Commission on Environmental Law agreed to strengthen work in this field and to seek additional opportunities for cooperation in the future.