
Commemorating the Mangrove Action Day on July 26th

In 2000, July 26th was first chosen as a day for the mangroves based on its great significance for the movement in Latin America led by Red Manglar (Mangrove Network). July 26th commemorates that day in 1998 when a Greenpeace activist from Micronesia, Hayhow Daniel Nanoto, died of a heart attack while involved in a massive protest action led by FUNDECOL and Greenpeace International. During this action the local community of Muisne joined the NGOs in dismantling an illegally built shrimp pond in an attempt to restore this damaged zone back to its former state as a mangrove forest. Since Hayhow's death, FUNDECOL and others have commemorated this day as a day to remember and to take renewed action to Save the Mangroves!

In 2003, MAP (Mangrove Action Project) and Red Manglar joined forces to encourage fisherfolk from around the world to join them on Mangrove Action Day to form cooperative flotillas to protest the destructive expansion of shrimp farming in their areas. This call to action got positive responses from Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Ecuador, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Honduras, Nigeria, Senegal, Kenya, Europe and the USA.

Since then, every July 26th has become an annual global commemorative day for the mangroves. This year's theme is entitled "Mangroves, Our Natural Heritage". According to the Latin American Red Manglar based in Ecuador, "Mangroves are our heritage, our source of life, our livelihood, our place of work, our warehouse and our home".

However, from Mexico to Peru, there are daily news of pollution, deforestation and devastation of mangrove ecosystems promoted by hydroelectric, tourism and shrimp aquaculture mega-projects. The contamination of estuaries, dredging of their channels, civil engineering works planned in detriment of these ecosystems and the indiscriminate felling of the forests are a constant.

Red Manglar warns that "In those countries where the loss of protective barriers to confront natural phenomena was caused by the indiscriminate felling of mangroves, not even floods, tropical hurricanes and cyclones have been able to decrease the destructive spirit of industrial tourism, incapable of turning their eyes towards what happened in Asia just a year and one-half ago, when the terrible tsunami devastated magnificent tourist facilities and, of course, entire towns."

In Bangladesh, on the Mangrove Action Day the Institute for Environment and Development Studies organized a discussion meeting. The speakers warned that destruction of mangrove forests would worsen increasing sufferings of the world's poorest people in the coastal areas, slashing their resilient power in the face of cyclones, tidal bores and tsunami. They said that "the destruction of mangrove forests exposes our ecosystems. Lessons from our experience of most recent Asian tsunami taught that mangrove forests protected Bangladesh and Indian South Eastern coast from the onslaught of the devastating Tsunami. Mangrove forests like the Sunderbans support life on earth and mangroves need protection and conservation more so because of ever increasing propensities of threatening tsunami, cyclones and sea-level rises."

Also the Centre for Coastal Environmental Conservation (CCEC), from Bangladesh, has undertaken

a programme on the protection of southwest coastal ecosystems of Bangladesh particularly at polder 30 Batiaghata Upazilla (sub district) by forming a 51 member Mangrove Protection Society (MPS). They are planning to address the activity in polder 32 of Dacope, adjacent to Sundarban, the UNESCO declared World Heritage site

In India, COPDANET! held Art, Drawing and Painting competitions for school children emphasising Mangrove Action Day which was celebrated on a grand scale with rally, public meeting and prize distribution by senior Forest Officials.

As for Africa, the local NGO "Congo Nature Conservation" commemorated the international day receiving messages and phone calls to support the mangroves sustainable management program of Congo threatened by town planning, marine pollution by oil, bad fishing techniques, etc.

As MAP says, "Momentum is building globally to assume responsibility for the defense, conservation and recuperation of this severely threatened ecosystem, as it is a heritage of our nations and territory of traditional indigenous communities".

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