

# CLOSING OF THE CONFERENCE

## The Experience so Far With the RSPO



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First Latin American Meeting of  
the Roundtable on Sustainable  
Palm Oil, RSPO

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A very good afternoon to all of you and in particular to Mr. Jan-Kees Vis, President of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, to Mr. Vengetta Rao, the Secretary-General, to my friends Jens Mesa and Miguel Mazorra, from Fedpalma, to all the palm producers present, and to the national and international guests.

Although you've already heard the background to this meeting, I would like to share with you the experience I have had with the RSPO.

Exactly a year ago, Jens Mesa and Miguel Mazorra insisted that I attend the 5<sup>th</sup> Roundtable Meeting. Jens Mesa generously gave me his place and with great effort I was able to attend as a guest – a visit that, as he said, was exhausting. I spent more time on the plane than in the meeting; when I got back, I thought that it had been madness but that it had been worth the effort. We managed to organize the 1<sup>st</sup> Latin American Meeting of the RSPO.

The truth is the meeting in Kuala Lumpur left me wholly impressed. There is no word that can describe the organization of the private sector and the NGOs around the interpretation of the sustainability Principles and Criteria of the oil palm sector.

Never before had I seen such a meeting. The private sector was working on sustainability in a voluntary and dedicated way. That was what led me, as Vice-Minister, to propose a global meeting, convinced as I was that Colombia has

many things to show. Even if we are not in the same level of production in the global rankings, we do have a very high level of commitment to sustainability in our oil palm sector.

Very politely, Jens Mesa told me that it had already been decided that Indonesia would host the 6<sup>th</sup> Roundtable Meeting, but that we could nonetheless organize the 1<sup>st</sup> Latin American Meeting. I understood that this was the opportunity to open a space in which to work with the private sector, especially in a context where the issue of oil palm, and of biofuels in particular, has generated so much polarization.

I believe that the support, work and dedication that have been shown in the National Interpretation of the sustainability Principles and Criteria allow the development of this economic activity and also contribute to solving the problems which are being discussed globally. Obviously these issues are linked to corporate social and environmental responsibility.

You may ask yourselves why the Minister of Environment, Housing and Territorial Development opened the event and the Vice-Minister is closing it, and why the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development is not here. I would respond that, from an environmental perspective, we are absolutely convinced by and committed to those sectors which, voluntarily or in fulfillment of the law, are willing to show that it is possible to carry out economic activities in a sustainable manner. It is because of this that the Ministry of Environment has been present at this event, in its inauguration as well as at its close.

The Ministry has advanced in the fulfillment and in the interpretation not just of the Principles and Criteria, but also in the development of the policy guidelines directed towards this subject.

Since 1997, the Ministry of Environment has signed agreements with Fedepalma to promote cleaner production and the development of highly sustainable activities. It is worth recognizing that these cleaner production agreements do not incorporate the dimensions of sustainable production and consumption. Now, with the sustainability Principles and Criteria, we are going to review these agreements to enrich them and to continue working together in the fulfillment of those objectives.

The RSPO is very linked with what is established in the National Development Plan's chapter on environmental sustainability. This refers to a strategy which we define as a promotion of productive processes and sustainability competition. We do so because we are convinced that, if the highest environmental standards are fulfilled, national products will have greater opportunities to access international markets, especially –and I want to repeat this once more– in cases like that of biofuels which have generated great debate globally and in issues related to environmental protection, biodiversity conservation and food security.

In 2007, the Ministry of Environment, Housing and Territorial Development participated with other parts of the National Government in producing a policy document entitled Strategy for the Competitive Development of the Colombian Oil Palm Sector.

Since that moment, environmental elements have been incorporated and some ideas have been rethought. Among the new ideas are that the environment doesn't destroy GDP, that it is not obstacle for the development of productive activities and that, on the contrary, the environmental variable is a dimension of competitiveness.

The environment, as we see it from the Ministry and as you understood it on signing up to and committing to the development and the National Interpretation of the Principles and Criteria, is an added value to your products which allows you to access national and international markets.

With industry and the scientific sector, we have work on strategic environmental evaluation with emphasis on biodiversity to develop the policies and programs related with biofuels.

Our National Environmental System has research institutes which serve as the basis for the creation of norms and policies, duly substantiated with correct information. This information allows the measurement of impact indicators which help to carry out the strategic-environmental-assessment zoning.

In this, we have worked together with the Alexander von Humboldt Institute, a scientific institute of great experience and renown in the issue of biodiversity.



We have also carried out activities with international NGOs like WWF.

In March, CONPES (the National Council for Economic and Social Policy) published a policy document to promote the sustainable production of biofuels and to establish some specific environmental guidelines which commit the country to the certification of biofuels production.

By way of conclusion, I would like to stress that we have fulfilled our task of developing technical and scientific knowledge. We have the necessary instruments to undertake the certification process. Colombia is ready. Colombia is going to be the fourth country in the world, and the first in Latin America, to develop a National Interpretation of the RSPO Principles and Criteria.

We, as members of the Ministry of Environment, feel proud because the issue of sustainability has a very strong environmental component. That is the intention

which, as a national government, we should try to realize. We see in this work a strategic alliance between the private and public sectors which many years ago was not seen, especially in the environmental sector.

I believe that this RSPO meeting is an example of what is possible and, as a result, the Ministry of Environment would like to congratulate Fedepalma, the members of the RSPO who are here, and of course all those people who attended this meeting renew their commitment, sharing their experiences, strategies and objectives in the development of a sustainable economic activity.

I would like to thank you all. I hope that the international guests have been able to enjoy the beauty of this city and the warmth of the Colombian people. I look forward to seeing you again in Ecuador at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Latin American Meeting or possibly in the 6<sup>th</sup> RSPO Meeting.

Many thanks.