
GERARD WOLTERS — LOCAL EVENT OPENING COMMENTS

Buenos Dias! Bienvenidos y Gracias por compartir con nosotros este sueño de promover un medio ambiente mejor.

Good morning. My name is Gerard Wolters, and I am the Inspector General at the Dutch Environment Ministry. I am pleased to join you this morning both on behalf of my ministry, and on behalf of the International Network for Environmental Compliance and Enforcement, known as INECE, where I serve as one of the co-chairs. INECE is proud to be one of the sponsors of this important seminar.

I am privileged to be in your beautiful country not only for your seminar, but also to present the 6th International Conference for INECE. We hope many of you will be able to join us for that event as well, which will be held in this same hotel all of next week.

I should tell you a bit more about INECE. We are a network, of course, and we are dedicated to protecting our shared environment by strengthening enforcement and compliance.

We have three goals. The first is to strengthen the capacity of the institutions dedicated to enforcing our environmental laws, and ensuring compliance. Our second goal is to develop effective enforcement networks at the national, regional, and international level (including through seminars such as yours today). And our third goal is to raise awareness of the importance of environmental enforcement and compliance.

All of us in the business of enforcement and compliance are hard working professionals, but not everyone appreciates the importance of our work as much as they should. And why is this? It is because we do not explain our work to others. We seem to talk more among ourselves, and rarely to those outside the business of enforcement. One of our goals is to change this, and let everyone know what we stand for and what we do.

We must start with the laws we have to protect the environment. We have many wonderful laws in all of our countries. We have wonderful laws at the regional and at the international level as well. In fact, in the 30 years since the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 1972 we have developed more than 300 new agreements or treaties. Our lawmakers actually have done a pretty good job. But in spite of all of these laws to protect the environment, the environment itself is getting worse. Most measures of environmental quality show continuing degradation across a broad spectrum, with serious consequences for public health and ecosystems, as well as for the rule of law and good governance.

A key reason for the continuing deterioration of our environment is the failure to enforce our environmental laws. It is the failure to invest in the strengthening of enforcement and compliance programs. At the international level, this Enforcement Gap is illustrated by CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, one of our better know treaties, which dates back to the early 1970s. There are 154 countries that are parties to CITES. Yet 76, nearly half do not meet one or more of the requirements for implementing and enforcing this key treaty. This is clearly not right. Without stronger enforcement and compliance, CITES cannot do its job of protecting endangered species. The facts speak for themselves: by some estimates, we are losing 27,000 species a year. That is 74 species every day, 3 every hour, a rate of extinction at least a thousand times greater than the natural rate.

This situation is repeated at the national, regional and international level for many other laws. And it is unacceptable if we are to have any realistic hope of leaving a healthy environment for the future. Closing this Enforcement Gap is the mission of INECE. And we are proud of the

work we do, even if it is not always appreciated! We do seem to inspire fear in people, although this is often as not based on a misunderstanding of the benefits of enforcement and compliance. Not enough people know that closing the Enforcement Gap generally brings benefits that outweigh the costs. One of your speakers today is an expert on this, Lawrence Pratt, and I'm sure he will tell you more about this, because it is a very important thing to know.

So, as you can see, our mission and our goals at INECE are similar to the goals of your seminar. Your seminar today will give you the opportunity to learn more about the topic of enforcement and to understand the tools of the trade. We are all dedicated to improving our environment, through environmental law that is better enforced and better complied with. We all have the same responsibility to the environment, whether we are citizens, enforcement officials, or whether we work for an NGO or a university. We have the duty to protect and improve our environment, which we all depend upon, for life itself. If

we do not enforce the laws against pollution of our water and our air, our citizens will suffer, and some will die. If we do not enforce the laws protecting our natural resources so that they are managed sustainably, our species will continue to be driven to extinction, and our fisheries and other resources will continue to be depleted. And our citizens will suffer, and some will be without the food they need to live. For all of us, our world will be impoverished, and much of the mystery and magic of the natural world will be lost forever.

But by sharing our ideas in seminars and conferences, we all have the opportunity to learn how to do our jobs better, and the lives of all of our citizens will be better. By learning from one another and building networks together, we will learn to protect the environment better, and the lives of our grandchildren will be better. But you all already know this, and that is the reason you are here, on a Saturday at that. So I will let you get on with your important work, and wish you well with your seminar.