Tribute to Mr Cyril de Klemm

13 April 1999

The Ramsar Bureau is grieved by the passing of Cyril de Klemm in Paris on 1 April 1999. Mr de Klemm contributed to the development of the Convention on Wetlands over many many years as informally its legal adviser and, in legal matters, as its historian. Mr de Klemm was involved in the original drafting of the Convention text, and it has been said that, if more of his suggestions had been adopted in those early days, the drawn-out protocol negotiations and amendments of the 1980s might not have been necessary.

Mr de Klemm was also very much involved in the Paris Protocol itself (1982) and the whole procedure which culminated in the Regina Amendments of 1987. He also played a key role in devising the provisional application procedure for those amendments, which enabled the Convention to establish the Standing Committee and a permanent secretariat (the “Bureau”), have a Convention budget, and generally take decisions at the COPs, prior to the entry into force of the amendments in 1994. This procedure was quite innovative at that time and its importance for the success of the Convention cannot be underestimated.

Mr de Klemm was also a key actor in the push for the need for interpretation of Convention provisions such as “Wise Use” and the need for guidelines for application of Convention provisions -- he made the first compilation of Ramsar legal decisions and was the lead author for the legal section of the Wise Use Guidelines (1990). In collaboration with Isabelle Crétaux, Mr de Klemm wrote The Legal Development of the Ramsar Convention, which was published by the Bureau in 1995 and is still available in print and on the Ramsar Web site in the three Ramsar languages.

Daniel Navid, the Convention’s first Secretary General, was very close to Cyril de Klemm, and says that “Cyril was especially remarkable in that he could bridge the very wide gap between science and law. He had a passion for the natural world along with an incredibly creative mind. His vision led to the adoption of a huge array of new legal approaches for environmental management. Cyril was also a kind and gentle man, and he will be greatly missed”.

"Cyril was a man of talent and passion", says Delmar Blasco, Ramsar’s present Secretary General. "We will certainly
miss him at the next COP in Costa Rica, as an environmental law professional and as a gifted interpreter (I used to put my earphones on just for the pleasure of hearing his impeccable work!). But I am consoled by the fact that Cyril will still be with us in spirit, when the Conference considers the proposed Guidelines for reviewing laws and institutions to promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands [by Clare Shine, Lyle Glowka, and the IUCN Environmental Law Centre], a very important new tool for the Convention to which he has also made a major contribution.

The memory of Mr de Klemm’s lifetime of work in environmental law will doubtless remain as an inspiration to everyone who knew him.

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