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**In memory of Gamani Corea –
South Centre event 20 March 2014**

**Anecdotes from the environmental dimension
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I have been a former UNCTAD staff member three times over. UNCTAD was my entry point into the United Nations Secretariat, back in 1967. I was brought in by Wlodek Malinowski, one of the architects of the institution. I left for the last time in 1991, from the Cabinet of Secretary-General Kenneth Dadzie, when I was parachuted into the climate change negotiations. During my second spell on board that started in 1974, Secretary-General Gamani Corea took me on as “special assistant” for some four years.

My overall recollection of that time in Gamani’s front office is of striving, in support of Deputy Secretary-General Stein Rossen, to keep the “management agenda” on Gamani’s desk while his brilliant mind was fixed on the prospect of transforming the global commodity economy – an uphill struggle indeed!

But it is not that Gamani Corea whom I will recall today. It is the Corea who was a pioneer on the interface of “development and environment”, later known as “sustainable development” – the Gamani I discovered when I first left UNCTAD to join Maurice Strong’s secretariat preparing for the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment.

Founex and Stockholm

The Stockholm Conference was initially perceived as a “Northern” initiative, dealing with pollution as “a disease of wealthy societies” (in Strong’s words). Developing countries questioned its relevance to their national priorities. On taking over the secretariat, Strong realised the need to integrate the development perspective in the aims of the conference and thus attract the engagement of developing countries. To this end, he mobilised a few development economists from the “South” as Special Advisers. Gamani Corea was one of these; the others were Mahbub ul-Haq and Enrique Iglesias.

Strong drew on their advice to convene a Panel of Experts on Development and Environment that assembled in Founex, near Geneva, in June 1971. It was an intellectual powerhouse, comprising mainly economists and development planners from

across the globe. (Among them, I mention today Jan Tinbergen, Nobel laureate in Economic Sciences and early mentor of Jan Pronk, present here.) There were surprisingly few environmentalists in the group. Corea chaired the Panel (admirably, said Strong in his foreword to its report); ul-Haq led the drafting and Iglesias made an important substantive contribution.

The Founex Report was instrumental in opening the way for the proactive participation of developing countries in the Stockholm Conference. Surviving participants that I have been able to contact, notably Maurice Strong himself, have confirmed to me the political weight that Gamani's presence in the Chair lent to the event and to its product. Maurice added that Gamani's committed leadership meant a great deal to him and deserves to be recognized and remembered.

While the location of the Panel - the Motel de Founex, up by the Divonne autoroute exit - was recently demolished, the thrust of the Founex Report echoes through the decades. Its central messages were:

- Poverty eradication must be the overriding aim of economic and social development.
- Environmental norms, costs and benefits must be integrated in the development framework.
- Additional development assistance is needed, inter alia to cover the incremental cost of environmentally advantageous technologies.

We have heard those messages since. We still hear them today.

In that context, the report also signalled:

- the potential for developing countries to leap-frog the "mistakes and distortions" experienced by industrialized countries through their neglect of the environmental dimension of development,
- the possible impacts on developing countries' exports of changing patterns of production and consumption in their developed markets – today we would talk of the trade impact of the "green economy"; and
- the risks of environmental protectionism and conditionality.

There is another distant echo. In Strong's assessment, the Founex Report brought out important *differences* in the perspectives of industrialized and developing countries, while making a compelling case for *common* action in some areas. This tension between differentiation and commonality is with us to this day.

Cocoyóc

Soon after taking over as head of UNCTAD, Gamani Corea convened with Strong, by then Executive Director of UNEP, the Symposium on “Patterns of Resource Use, Environment and Development Strategies” held in Cocoyóc (Mexico) in October 1974.

The intellectual drivers of that group were British economist Barbara Ward (Lady Jackson), Norwegian polymath Johan Galtung and (Polish-born) French socio-economist Ignacy Sachs. The proceedings in Cocoyóc were much influenced by the political context of the times in the United Nations – that was the period of Special Sessions of the General Assembly, the New International Economic Order and the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States, the latter proposed by Mexico’s President Echeverría who attended the Symposium.

The content and the tone of the Cocoyóc Declaration were thus more radical, more ideological than the Founex Report: redefining the purpose of development – “not to develop things but to develop man”; attacking inequality; rejecting “trickle down” and “growth first” models; proclaiming the diversity of self-reliant development paths; and exploring the scope for social justice in the space between the physical “outer limits” of the planet and the “inner limits” of basic human needs and human rights.

It is not surprising that this Declaration drew the wrath of US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger on the heads of UNEP and UNCTAD – though Kissinger did not decline to attend the UNCTAD IV conference two years later in Nairobi, the home of UNEP.

In the next few years, Gamani Corea lent his name and gave advice to initiatives following up on Founex, Stockholm and Cocoyóc: the 1975 Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation project, entitled “What Now? Another Development”, and the International Foundation for Development Alternatives (IFDA), set up in 1976 in Nyon, both directed by Marc Nerfin, who was Maurice Strong’s Chef de Cabinet in the Stockholm secretariat – and my boss. Strong was involved in both initiatives and Jan Pronk, as Netherlands Minister of Development Cooperation, was one of their main supporters.

South Commission and South Centre

The remaining evidence I have of Gamani Corea’s activity in the environmental dimension of development comes a long time later, after he had left UNCTAD and moved into the sphere of the South

Commission and its successor South Centre. And for this evidence I am indebted to Branislav Gosovic, formerly on the staff of both these bodies.

In September 1991, Gamani chaired a working group on "The South and UNCED¹". President Nyerere had convened this group at the suggestion of the Secretary-General of UNCED, Maurice Strong, to remedy the disarray in the negotiating positions of the Group of 77. The group - including Martin Khor and Chakravarti Raghavan here today - proposed "a comprehensive negotiating strategy for the South" towards the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and the parallel negotiations on biological diversity and climate change.

The two strategic objectives that emerged were:

- ensuring adequate "environmental space" for the future development of developing countries; and
- obtaining on the right terms the resources, technology and access to markets required for development.

On climate change, the bold complementary vision encompassed long-term convergence of per capita emissions of greenhouse gases and international trade in emission rights.

The discussion in this working group led to the later formulation by the Group of 77 of its position on "common but differentiated responsibilities" that was incorporated in the Rio Declaration. Here I note - compared to the hint from Founex that I quoted earlier - the change of the order of the two concepts and the substitution of "but" for the earlier "and" - both tweaks putting the weight on differentiation. I also note that, in the 1992 Climate Change Convention (UNFCCC) that was opened for signature in Rio, this formula was expanded with the rider "and respective capabilities".

Moving forward to 2002 and looking ahead to the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development that year, Gamani Corea - as Chairman of the Board of the South Centre - wrote a brief note as a preface to an essay published by the Centre on the continuity of the basic issues before the Summit over the three decades since Founex. The note was modestly entitled "Some random thoughts on 'sustainable development'". This two-pager is precious in that it is the only text on this subject signed by Gamani that my searches have unearthed.

In his note, Corea identifies "development" as the common goal of developing countries and asks why the condition of "sustainability"

¹ UNCED = United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held at Rio de Janeiro in June 1992.

should be applied to those countries alone. I respectfully question this definition of “development”, believing that to be a universal goal. I would also question the implication that sustainability is a constraint on development, understanding development to be the advancement of human well being over the long term. But I support the conclusion – which I paraphrase - that sustainability in technologies and lifestyles must be an aim for all countries in their different ways and that developed countries must walk their sustainability talk, show the way ahead and make room for the growing demand of developing countries for ecological space.

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Concluding thoughts

Looking back on Gamani Corea’s activity on the development and environment front, the feature that I retain is his political commitment: his readiness to engage openly with an emerging and sometimes controversial agenda that would give a deeper meaning to the concept of development itself, his availability to provide advice and guidance.

Had Gamani been with us today, I would have asked him for his take on the evolution of the “South” and the “North” over the half-century since UNCTAD I. What are the implications for international equity of growing inequalities on both sides of that political and emotional divide? How to apply the principle of South-North differentiation when the countries in the middle range of the global income per capita ranking – as well as in the “Top Ten” - are a mix of both North and South?

I am sure he would have offered a thoughtful reply, perhaps provocative and certainly witty! Alas, he isn’t here. And I can only strive to imagine what he might have said.

Michael Zammit Cutajar