

*International Year of the Reef Symposium, ICRI
Mexican Cultural Institute
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- It is a great pleasure to welcome all of you to the closing symposium of the 2008 International Coral Reef Initiative's (ICRI) general meeting.
- This year Mexico and the United States, as joint secretaries, have put together an excellent general meeting here in Washington, DC that, I understand, has been most productive and successful.
- As a Mexican diplomat I do not often get to talk about coral reefs and even less so as the Ambassador of Mexico to the United States. However, as a scuba diving junkie and the son of two biologists, I am delighted to do so here today.
- The first thing I would like to underscore is the fact that President Calderón has made the protection of the environment a top priority for the Mexican Government.
- As one of five mega-diverse nations in the world today, this commitment is perhaps not surprising. However, President Calderón's dedication stems not from mere national pride or recognition of being blessed by this immense biodiversity, but rather from a clear understanding of the fact that as Mexicans and indeed as humans, we are merely caretakers of this most precious inheritance and as such we must preserve and protect it and contribute to all international efforts to that effect.
- The Calderón Administration has thus been working hard in this regard.
- At the national level, since President Calderón assumed office the budget for the National Commission for Protected Natural Areas has significantly increased.
- We have, as a country, designated 11% of our total territory, under one or another modality, as protected areas.

- We have achieved a hard-earned and recognized leadership around the world in the promotion of the effective participation of local communities in the preservation and protection of natural areas
- We have a thriving tourism industry that is fully committed to sustainable development.
- And at the international level we have also been taking important steps, making environmental protection a key component of our foreign policy.
- We are signatories of close to 100 international environmental agreements and active participants in all major international environmental initiatives.
- We were one of the first emerging economies that signed and ratified the UN Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol and the first, and so far only, emerging economy that has submitted all three of its National Communications in fulfillment of its obligations under these agreements.
- In particular, Mexico is currently playing an important role in the negotiations on climate change.
- And our active participation in ICRI is also a clear example of this commitment and international activism in this area.
- Be assured, therefore, that you will always find in Mexico a committed and trusted partner in any effort aimed at protecting the environment in general and at protecting coral reefs in particular.
- I wish you the very best of success in 2008 as the International Year of the Reef. Today's symposium is no doubt a good start in ensuring that this year will be a landmark-year for reef preservation. Thank you.