

12 September 2010

To: Dr. Ahmed Djoghlaif, Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity

From: KASHIWAGI Minoru, KURECHI Masayuki, HANAWA Shinichi, HORI Ryoichi,
Co-Representatives,
and ASANO Masatomi, Secretary General,
Ramsar Network Japan Specified Nonprofit Corporation

Re: Enquiry about the CBD Award to Korean President Lee Myung Bak

Dear Dr. Djoghlaif,

We are representatives of the Ramsar Network Japan, a network of grassroots wetland conservation groups in Japan, that is working for the conservation and wise use of wetlands. We would like to enquire about the reasons for giving the CBD Award to the Korean President Lee Myung Bak.

The CBD release states that “The Award represents the CBD Secretariat’s recognition of President Lee’s outstanding contribution and commitment to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity as a major instrument for achieving a green economy and sustainable development”.

We have worked very closely with Korean NGOs and researchers for more than 10 years, on many topics including the conservation of tidal flats and wetlands, and we are aware of the destructive wetland developments that have taken place and are being proposed in Korea. It was therefore very surprising to learn that CBD Secretariat has given President Lee the Award for his ‘contribution to biodiversity conservation’.

The mega-scale coastal developments, such as the Saemangeum project, have destroyed many of Korea’s rare coastal ecosystems and biodiversity, which were of regional and international importance. After President Lee was elected, the speed of the coastal environmental destruction has accelerated and more damaging projects are being proposed, such as the tidal power plants that will impound internationally important tidal flats. At the same time, President Lee is directly responsible for massive development projects on the four ‘Main Rivers’ in Korea, and criticisms of this project are growing not only within Korea, but also around the world.

This Four River development project includes the creation of dams over 20 and the dredging of more than 500,000,000 tons of soil from the river basins, which hosted rich biodiversity. There is no doubt that this project will destroy the habitats of rare species, and damage the natural river basin ecosystems. President Lee announces this as ‘green growth’, but the project has been implemented without detailed environmental evaluations or assessments. It is misleading to call any project ‘green’ without proper environmental impact assessments and evaluations, and where damage to biodiversity has been clearly shown.

The CBD Award to President Lee, in this UN year of Biodiversity, will only help the acceleration of 'green' distractions to the environment in other countries, and then this could lead to the massive global loss of biodiversity, which might draw a result contradictory to the new 'Aichi-Nagoya Strategic Plan' to be adopted at CBD-COP10 in the next month.

We would like to enquire the CBD Secretariat following points concretely.

1. Background information of CBD Award:

- Frequency of awarding
- Names of past awardees
- Qualification for being awarded
- Criteria of assessment and Procedure of selection

2. On the present awarding of President Lee:

- Who nominated President Lee to the Award?
- What was the procedure of selection?
- What is the rationale for selecting President Lee?

Many citizens and NGOs in Korea oppose President Lee's actions, including the Four Rivers project, and this award seems to present the CBD Secretariat as out of touch with public concerns and the evidence of environmental impacts. We would like to work with CBD to correct any misunderstandings, whatever they may be, and perhaps to save the CBD considerable international embarrassment, especially during the holding of CBD COP10 in Nagoya, Japan.

Knowing the busy schedule preparing for the COP, we would appreciate a reply by 27 September 2010.

With best regards,

KASHIWAGI, Minoru

Cc: UNEP (Mr Achim Steiner); CMS (Ms Elisabeth Maruma Mrema); Ramsar Secretariat (Mr Anada Tiéga); IUCN; BirdLife International; Wetlands International; WWF International; IWMI

NB: This letter will be publicly posted to the Ramsar Network Japan website, WWN website and the Ramsar Forum from the 13th of September