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Biodiversity

Mexican Ecologist Gets Top Environmental Award



By Emily Pickrell

Mexican ecologist Jose Sarukhan, who spurred the country to create one of the world's first biodiversity-protection agencies, is being awarded the Tyler Prize, a top international environmental award.

Sarukhan, who a quarter century ago helped establish the Mexican National Commission for the Knowledge & Use of Biodiversity (Conabio), will be honored May 4 in Washington, D.C.

"An adequately informed society with reliable information is the best partner you can have to defend biological diversity," Sarukhan told Bloomberg BNA, explaining his vision behind creation of the government agency, which he convinced then-President Carlos Salinas to launch in 1992. "When [citizens] understand the importance of keeping their ecosystems healthy, then we build a critical partner in demanding that the people in government do the right things."

Conabio has been involved in research on genetically modified crops in Mexico and strategies for ensuring biodiversity protection in agricultural areas. It has developed a system for cataloging endangered species, for preventing the further deforestation of protected areas and for prioritizing future protected areas.

It also faces constant challenges in a nation where poverty, rapid development and a powerful agricultural sector all pose threats to biodiversity.

The Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement, which carries a \$200,000 award, was established in 1973. Past winners include primatologist Jane Goodall and naturalist author E.O. Wilson.

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