

This Mexican Scientist Won The Greatest US Environmental Science Award, And Is Inspiring The Next Generation Of Latin Scientists

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As tensions continue to flare between Donald Trump and Mexico, the United States' greatest environmental science award has been bestowed upon - of all people - Mexico's most outspoken conservation scientist.

What made the event even more remarkable, was that the prize was awarded just minutes down from the road from the White House, where President Trump continues to spout anti-science and anti-Mexico rhetoric.

The [Tyler Prize](#), widely regarded as the 'Nobel for The Environment', was this month awarded to Professor José Sarukhán— considered by many as one of the founding fathers of biodiversity in Latin America. The Mexican laureate was warmly welcomed among the US science community, as well as a jubilant audience in Mexico and in the furthest reaches of Latin America.

2017 Tyler Prize Laureate, Mexico's José Sarukhán

After the news broke of Sarukhán's win, the online Spanish-speaking community lit up, with thousands writing words of congratulations to Sarukhán on social platforms and the comments section in news websites. Many cited his work with [CONABIO](#), a federally funded department dedicated to protecting the country's biodiversity – which he conceived of in 1992, and now leads.

With a front row seat at the Awards ceremony – Professor Sarukhán's own son, Arturo Sarukhán, the former Mexican Ambassador to the United States (and [vocal critic of President Trump](#)), [tweeted](#) at the awards ceremony, "Very proud of my father José Sarukhán receiving the [@TylerPrize](#) in Washington for his work on the environment, biodiversity & conservation."



Arturo Sarukhan ✓

@Arturo_Sarukhan

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Very proud of my father Jose Sarukhan receiving the @TylerPrize in Washington for his work on the environment, biodiversity & conservation



https://twitter.com/Arturo_Sarukhan/status/860280045247574016

When Sarukhán was announced as the 2017 Tyler laureate back in February, Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto also [tweeted](#) “It is a well-deserved recognition of his tireless work in favor of biodiversity and his commitment to institutional strengthening” in regards to the laureate.

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But praise of Professor Sarukhán and his work extended beyond the scientific and political spheres, with one Latinx Twitter user [called](#) him “a big one, who forged history in the field of biodiversity in Mexico.”



<https://twitter.com/mfloresre/status/834594962239000580>

Another user [acknowledged](#) that “la gente del campo,” or people who come from a less wealthy background, or even impoverished environment ““sólo tienen como forma de vida,” do not only have one path towards a fruitful and successful way of life.



<https://twitter.com/saulcastrovejar/status/834636642065514496>

Implicit within this statement is the notion that not all people of Mexican descent are only capable of or destined towards blue collar work. In a North American culture that is growing increasingly more hostile towards the Latino minority, and Mexican populations more generally, Sarukhán represents on a grander, and more public scale the often ignored capability of Latinos to not only thrive and succeed, but be the best in many types of fields of expertise. This gives hope to not only younger generations of Latinos who might see this lack of representation in the field as a sign that perhaps they should not pursue a career in the sciences, and also to lay people who may not consider themselves to be “scientists,” but are still concerned with matters of environmental conservation and how that plays a role in social politics.

Sarukhán’s award also carries a special cultural significance, in that Professor Sarukhán’s former mentor, Mexican botanist [Arturo Gomez Pompa](#), received the Prize in 1994, for his pioneering research into the plant life of tropical forests. Mexican Nobel Prize winner [Mario Molina](#), who in 1983 received the award for establishing a hypothesis on ozone depletion, was also in [attendance](#) at the D.C. events on May 4.

Jon Black Photography

Mario Molina speaking with fellow Tyler Prize event attendees prior to Professor Sarukhán’s lecture in Washington D.C.



The presence of José Sarukhán’s contemporaries and mentors brings light to a community of Latino scientists whose work often goes under-recognized both in the United States and on a global scale. It is through these dedicated visionaries, who helped pioneer Mexico’s environmental efforts, that Sarukhán was able to benefit from such

essential mentorship. Because of this strong connection with his fellow laureates, he is now seen as both a beacon of inspiration to the Spanish-speaking world, and the fields of biodiversity and conservation.