

Award for Ambassador Bagher Asadi

The ceremony for the 2001 Elizabeth Haub Prize for Environmental Diplomacy took place at the White Plains campus of Pace University, New York on Monday, 18 March 2002. Unlike the previous two years,¹ there was only one recipient: Ambassador Bagher Asadi of the Permanent Mission of Iran to the United Nations in New York. This is contrary to the informal rule that so far has appeared to establish itself, namely that each year two individuals are concurrently bestowed with the award: one from the South and one from the North. However, as stated within the agreement between Pace University and the International Council of Environmental Law (ICEL), this Prize is only awarded when there is a truly deserving candidate and for that matter need not even be awarded on a yearly basis.

Unlike the Elizabeth Haub Prize for Environmental Law, established in 1973, which recognises exceptional services to the academic field of international environmental law, this Prize, created in 1999 (also sponsored by the Elizabeth Haub Foundations for Environmental Law and Policy – Canada and USA), is intended to honour in-

dividuals for their contributions to international environmental policy. The Jury that selects the candidates deserving of the award is composed of representatives from ICEL and the School of Law of Pace University. The two criteria for considering a candidate are: “(1) a positive contribution to the development and promotion of environmental law and policy in a general way; or (2) a particular instance, a new idea or initiative leading to a new concept in the field of environmental law and policy of one or several countries, and particular initiatives in this field.”

This year’s laureate has been selected by the Jury for his distinguished career in the diplomatic service of Iran and for actively participating in environmental law initiatives of international importance.

“Since 1984 when he first joined the Foreign Ministry’s Department of International Affairs, Bagher Asadi has served as a member of Iranian delegations to various international forums, including those to the United Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement. In 1988 he was appointed *Chargé d’Affaires* of the Permanent Mission of Iran to the United Nations Office at Geneva, a post he held until 1990. From 1992 to 1996, he acted as the Advisor to the Foreign Minister of Iran. Since his posting in New York in 1996 as Ambassador in charge of Economic and Social Affairs for the Permanent Mission

of Iran to the United Nations, he has actively participated in the work of various international forums, including the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests for which he served as Co-Chairman for the period 1997-2000.² He also served as Vice-Chair and Rapporteur of the Preparatory Committee for the Five-Year Review of the 1995 World Summit for Social Development.

In 1998 he was elected Chairman of the Second Committee (Economic and Financial) for the Fifty-third Session of the UN General Assembly and in 2001 he held the Chairmanship of the Group of 77 in New York. He also served as the Coordinator of the open-ended informal consultations on the Report of the Secretary-General on Environment and Human Settlements which ultimately led to UN General Assembly Resolution 53/242. He also took the opportunity to indulge our readership with a personal in-depth account of these negotiations.³ The resulting decision sparked a series of talks not only on increasing the effectiveness of UNEP, but the international environmental architecture in general, as we have documented in our coverage leading up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD)."

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The following is a summary of the proceedings of the award ceremony during which the Dean of the Pace University School of Law, David Cohen, acted as master of ceremonies and welcomed participants.

He introduced David Caputo, President of Pace University. In his speech, David Caputo commented on the dual function of Diplomat and Advocate and their role in strengthening global environmental cooperation in an increasingly complex world. He stressed this complexity by noting the increased participation of developing countries and quoted Ambassador Asadi: "Those working together in any context are becoming increasingly less alike in many respects: in origin, background and perspectives, lifestyles, values, behaviours, fields of specialisation and thought patterns..."

David Cohen emphasised that everyone involved in such processes must be brought to understand the challenges this poses, especially with regard to the vital issue of the environment. When parties of diverse origin gather around the negotiation table, they must bridge their differences in order to attain the common goal of improving the global environment and the overall condition of human life. As a last point, he highlighted Ambassador Asadi's most significant accomplishment during diplomatic negotiations – his contribution toward securing the support of the Developing States necessary for the approval of the Kyoto Protocol and other related international agreements which introduced the first concrete measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions on a global scale.

David Cohen then invited Ambassador Bagher Asadi to the podium, upon which Ambassador Bhagwat-Singh,

Secretary of the Jury, read the citation: "In high appreciation of distinguished accomplishments in furthering environmental protection, conserving natural resources, and advancing sustainable development through extraordinary service to international diplomacy, and in particular in securing the support of Developing Nations for implementation of the Kyoto Protocol and in the establishment of the United Nations Forest Forum."

In his function as Chair of the Jury, the Dean handed the diploma to the laureate and Wolfgang Burhenne, Executive Governor of the International Council of Environmental Law, placed the blue ribbon and gold medal around his neck.

The Executive Governor then gave his address:

"Excellencies, Mr President, Dean of the Faculty, Members of the Jury, Family Haub.

I have seen Ambassador Bagher Asadi in action many times over the past few years, and have come to admire him for many reasons: his capability as a negotiator, his visionary ideas, and his passion and patience in convincing colleagues of the need to seek common grounds.

In 1965, I was asked to serve as voluntary legal advisor to the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to help draft the African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, which was adopted in Algiers in 1968 and replaced an earlier treaty concluded by the Colonial Powers. At this time, Kofi Annan was working in Addis Ababa for the UN Economic Commission for Africa, which also supported the development of this – at that time – new Convention.

These negotiations opened my eyes not only to the problems and needs of the newly independent African States, but of developing nations in general. In the years that followed, mainly through my work on international and national environmental law development, I have learned more and more of the complexity of development issues facing countries in what is now referred to as the Group of 77 and China.

To lead and successfully shepherd in one direction the representatives of 132 significantly different nations, and so to speak bring their concerns

under one hat, is a difficult task, and a significant achievement. A year ago, when Bagher Asadi became Chairman of the G-77/China Group in the UN/GA, I could not help telling him that I did not envy him his difficult task – even if I was confident that he would more than master this challenge.



Dean Cohen acting as Master of Ceremonies

Courtesy: Pace University

I had become familiar with his style of work since he served as Chairman of the Second Committee (Economic and Financial) of the 53rd Session of the UN/GA, as well as Coordinator for the open-ended informal consultations on the report of the Secretary General on Environment and Human Settlements which resulted in UN GA resolution 53/242.

Bagher Asadi's special quality, which became his major asset as Chairman of the G-77 and China, is that he was constantly in search of meaningful compromises, and of consensus-oriented ways of resolving difficulties.

While achievements in this area are due to hard-won experience, they are also the result of a gift and a talent, as well as the product of an open mind.

The history of the negotiations of the above-mentioned informal negotiations has been described by Ambassador Asadi in an article published in our journal, *Environmental Policy and Law* some time ago. I consider this piece an ideal lecture on how to best approach international negotiations. The art of negotiation – a missing discipline of university *curriculae*!

What precedes explains why I am particularly happy about the Jury's decision to select Ambassador Asadi for this Award, well before President Bush made his famous remark about Iran – an example if there is one of dangerously sweeping political rhetoric.

As some of you know, I passed 37 months in Nazi concentration camps because I was caught red-handed with weapons for the German resistance against Nazi dictatorship. Judgement of collective guilt on the German people has therefore never been acceptable to me, nor justifiable. Nor is, in my opinion, any collective judgement for whatever reason.

This is why, to day, I am doubly pleased to have Bagher Asadi as our Awardee: for his personal merits, and for being a symbol of diplomacy from which others might well learn."

David Cohen then asked Ambassador Bagher Asadi to deliver his acceptance speech: "President Caputo, Dean Cohen, Mr and Mrs Haub, Distinguished Members of the Jury, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen."

"There are occasions and moments to find oneself speechless, or to be a little more liberal, short of words. Having listened to the extremely generous introductions by President Caputo and Dr Burhenne, this is certainly one of those moments for me when one is afflicted with a peculiar sense – a combination of joy and embarrassment.

As Mark Twain said, 'I am only human'. But, it simply cannot end there. One has to overcome a fleeting moment like that and move on to the more serious part of the solemn enterprise we are engaged in. Just to begin, let me say that it is a distinct honour and privilege for me to be here with you all; more so, to have been chosen for the Elizabeth Haub Award for Environmental Diplomacy, which I accept with deep pride and humility. Let me take the opportunity right here to express, on my own behalf as well as on behalf of my wife who couldn't be with us today, our deepest gratitude and appreciation to the Elizabeth Haub Foundation, Mr and Mrs Haub, Dr Wolfgang Burhenne and ICEL, Ambassador Singh, members of the Jury for the Award and the authorities of Pace University.

Our gathering here, fortunately now an annual occasion, is, first and foremost, to pay tribute to the vision of Elizabeth Haub, and also to her lasting legacy in contrib-



Amb. Bhagwat Singh, Secretary of the Jury, reads the citation. From left to right: the Laureate, President Caputo, Wolfgang Burhenne and Helga Haub

Courtesy: Pace University

uting to the development and promotion of environmental law and policy. Simultaneously, it is an occasion for acknowledgement and recognition of the outcome of endeavours which are, by nature, collective, even if the Award is given to an individual. What I receive today equally belongs to my numerous colleagues, Iranian and others, who have worked with me and helped me in various processes. They are not here, but they are in my mind and in my heart. This collective aspect, in my view, is the most fundamental element of it all.

Acceptance of this prestigious Award should help further solidify that resolve."

In closing, David Cohen once more offered congratulations to Ambassador Asadi and thanked all who had participated in celebrating this occasion.

(*The Laureate's paper on "The Merits of Multilateralism" is printed on page 170.*) (MAB)