

Preface

The Third International Congress of Ethnobotany began eleven days after "9/11", the fateful date of the attack on the Twin Towers of The World Trade Centre in New York. The photo on next page shows what the keynote speaker at the Congress saw that terrible day from his apartment in lower Manhattan. That tragic event caused the last minute cancellation by some colleagues who had planned to attend the Congress and its deep emotional impact was felt throughout the duration of the entire Congress.

Beyond its emotional impact on the Congress, I also see an indirect relationship between this event and several topics treated in the Congress.

Most of the research discussed in the Congress and now reported in the present Proceedings is about natural resource use and access. Among the admirable goals of many of these studies is that of identifying models that ensure sustainable management and equitable access to the world's natural resources. As everybody knows, scarcity and disparity in the availability or access to resources are an important cause of envy, racism, and conflicts between people. We also know that a small percentage of the world's inhabitants use the great majority of its natural resources and contribute inordinately to world pollution. Furthermore, in order to maintain their high standard of living, they cause a lowered standard of living for the rest of the world.

It is in regard to the issue of the sustainability and equity that I see an important link between events such as those of New York and the issues addressed by ethnobotanists.

The findings presented at the congress and synthesized in this volume indicate that ethnobotany is well placed to address important and urgent questions regarding the sustainable and equitable access and development of plant resources. Ethnobotany does this by helping to identify new plant sources and improving the use of available ones. The different papers highlight many of the complex and varied moral, ethical, theoretical and methodological issues addressed by ethnobotanists, and suggest a promising future for this discipline. To the extent that the scientific contributions of this volume make a contribution towards this goal, I, as President of the Third International Congress of Ethnobotany and Editor of this journal, thank all the people who attended the congress in Naples and the contributors of the present volume: their work is a testament to the success of the Congress.

I wish the organizers of all future ethnobotanical congresses great success in their efforts.

Aldo Moretti