Introduction

Sheila Abed*

Compliance with international environmental agreements and national environmental laws is essential to making progress toward sustainable development and central to the work of the IUCN Commission on Environmental Law (CEL). It is for this reason that I am particularly pleased to have had the opportunity to participate in and co-sponsor the 4th IUCN Academy of Environmental Law Colloquium titled “Toward More Effective Implementation of Environmental Law: Enforcement and Compliance.” The Academy grew out of the work of the Commission on Environmental Law and now stands as a key focal point for linking environmental law faculty around the world. Just as important, the Academy is a vital link between law faculty and environmental lawyers, allowing academic research to be informed by real world problems and allowing that research to inform public policy decisions.

This book captures much of the critical thinking on enforcement and compliance from the Colloquium. In doing so, it helps advance the IUCN Programme which explicitly seeks to improve the attention of decision makers on the role of a healthy environment on sustainability. This requires focus on three key issues: knowledge, empowerment and governance. We must know more to succeed in our efforts. We must ensure that all people have access to and influence in the decisions that affect sustainable development; and we must enhance the rule of law and build the capacities of governments to act in protecting resources and public health. Knowledge, empowerment and governance are all critical to well functioning legal systems and in advancing IUCN’s 2005-2008 vision of “Many Voices, One Earth.”

CEL’s mission is “to advance sustainability through the development of legal and policy concepts and instruments, and through building the capacities of societies to develop and implement environmental law and policy in furtherance of IUCN’s mission.” CEL is committed to influencing, encouraging and assisting societies throughout the world to attain conditions where national and international law and policies incorporate the legal, ethical concepts necessary to support sustainable development; where every country, government and NGO has the capacity to actively participate in an international policy debate, implement
agreements, ensure effective compliance and enforcement of both international agreements and national law; and every country, government and stakeholder has ready access to knowledge and information on environmental law and policies. These Colloquium Proceedings reflect many voices from many legal traditions, from many cultures, from many countries and from many customs and practices. If we join our voices together as we are doing here and if we use our work to gather additional voices, we can make significant contributions to protect our earth by significantly improving compliance programs throughout the world.

*Chair, IUCN Commission on Environmental Law.