

Dr. Janez Potočnik, evropski komisar za okolje

Gospa in gospodje,

na začetku naj vam čestitam ob 2. slovenski konferenci na temo okolja in človekovih pravic.

Povezava med okoljem in človekovimi pravicami je razmeroma nova, saj so jo na primer Združeni narodi uradno priznali šele v šestdesetih letih. Več kot desetletje za tem pa je leta 1972 v sklopu Konference o človekovem okolju nastala ideja, da je pravica do zdravega okolja temeljni del pravice do življenja in do osebnega dostojanstva.

Koncept človekovih pravic se je od takrat precej razširil in danes vključuje tudi pravice do zdravega okolja. Za vse nas je pomembno, da vemo, kakšen je zrak, ki ga dihamo, kakšna je voda, ki jo pijemo, in kakšno hrano uživamo. Vendar se pri tem postavlja vprašanje, ali smo lahko zares prepričani o kakovosti teh dobrin. Biti obveščen o tem, ali je nekaj dobro za naše zdravje in imeti dostop do takih dobrin, ki so dobre za naše zdravje, je naša pravica!

Zavedanje o teh pravicah mora temeljiti na dobri, uravnoteženi izobrazbi in obveščenosti. Nedavno so nas mediji z vseh strani oblegali z informacijami v zvezi z vulkanskim pepelom z Islandije. Pravzaprav pa bi morali biti vsak dan pozorni na dejstvo, da je takšnih – okolju in zdravju nevarnih dogodkov – še veliko več, naj omenim le strupene odpadke, onesnaževanje zraka, čezmerno lovljenje rib in podobno. Te informacije pa le redko dosežejo primerljive razsežnosti v medijih, čeprav bi morala biti javnost seznanjena tudi s tovrstno problematiko.

Državni organi, ki imajo natančne informacije o stanju perečih okoljskih tem, bi morali zagotoviti, da te informacije dosežejo tudi Evropejce. V nasprotnem primeru morajo imeti državljani možnost uporabiti pravna sredstva, da bi te informacij lahko dobili. Edini način, da oblikovanje politik lahko poteka z dejavnim in kakovostnim sodelovanjem javnosti, je na podlagi znanja in krepitev moči.

V Evropski uniji smo nekako privilegirani, saj smo že vzpostavili zelo ambiciozno okoljsko zakonodajno telo, ki nam ga lahko zavidajo marsikateri druge države. Leta 1985 smo sprejeli zakon, ki zahteva presojo vplivov na okolje za vse večje avtocestne ali letališke projekte in posvetovanje z javnostjo.

Leta 1990 smo sprejeli pravila dostopnosti javnih informacij širši javnosti, v letu 2001 pravila presoje in javnega posvetovanja glede načrtov in programov in leta 2003 pravila o sodelovanju javnosti v okoljskih zadevah in o poseganju po pravnih orodjih v primeru industrijskih dovoljenj in presoje projektov. V letu 2005 pa je Evropska unija pristopila k Aarhuški konvenciji, ki podpira in spodbuja vse okoljske pravice.

Ne glede na vse to še vedno obstajajo neenakosti in krivice. Največkrat so prav družbeno in ekonomsko šibkejšje skupine bolj izpostavljene resnim okoljevarstvenim problemom. To nas vodi k iskanju alternativnih rešitev za boj proti revščini, ki igra veliko vlogo tako pri okoljskih kot vseh drugih človekovih pravicah, kot so pravica do zdravega okolja, do zdravega življenja in do hrane.

Kot evropski komisar za okolje sem ponosen, da sem »podedoval« odgovornost za tako pomemben del evropske zakonodaje in si želim, da bi se ta pravila izvajala tudi v nacionalnih zakonodajah držav članic. Združevanje strokovnjakov s tega področja z namenom razprave o vključevanju javnosti je dober način podpore tem ciljem in razvoju okoljskih pravic v prihodnje.

A kljub vsemu – predvsem harmoničen odnos do narave je pogoj za kakovostno in zdravo življenje.

Želim vam čim bolj uspešno konferenco.

Janez Potočnik, PhD, European Commissioner for the Environment

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Firstly may I congratulate you on the second Slovenian conference on the topic of the environment and human rights.

The link between the environment and human rights is relatively new, with the United Nations for instance only officially recognising it in the 1960s. More than a decade later, in 1972 as part of the Conference on the Human Environment, they hit on the idea that the right to a healthy environment was a fundamental part of the right to life and to personal dignity.

The concept of human rights has since then expanded considerably, and today it also includes the right to a healthy environment. For all of us it is important to know what kind of air we are breathing, what kind of water we are drinking, and what kind of food we are eating. But the question arises here, whether we can be truly certain of the quality of these assets. Being informed about whether something is good for our health and having access to assets that are good for our health, is our right!

Awareness of these rights must be based on a good, balanced education and being well informed. Recently the media besieged us from all sides with information about the volcanic ash from Iceland. In fact every day we should be watchful of the fact that there are many more such instances – hazardous to the environment and health – and I only need mention toxic waste, air pollution, overfishing and so on. This information only rarely gets comparable space in the media, even though the public should be familiarised with such issues.

National authorities that possess precise information on the state of burning environmental topics, should ensure that this information reaches European people. Otherwise, citizens must have the possibility of using legal means to get hold of this information. The only way that policy-making can be conducted with the active and high-quality participation of the public, is on the basis of knowledge and enhanced power.

In the European Union we are somehow privileged, since we have already set up a very ambitious environmental legislation body, which many other countries might envy. In 1985 we adopted a law that requires environmental impact assessments for all major motorway or airport projects, plus consultation with the public. In 1990 we adopted rules on the accessibility of public information to the general public; in 2001 the rules on assessment and public consultation regarding plans and programmes, and in 2003 the rules on public participation in environmental matters and on resorting to legal remedies in the case of industrial permits and project assessments. In 2005 the European Union acceded to the Aarhus Convention, which supports and promotes all environmental rights.

Nevertheless, inequalities and injustices remain. Most often it is precisely the socially and economically weaker groups that are more exposed to serious environmental problems. This leads us to seek alternative solutions for the fight against poverty, which plays a major role both in environmental and all other human rights, such as the right to a healthy environment, the right to a healthy life and to food.

As European Environment Commissioner I am proud to have “inherited” responsibility for such an important part of European legislation, and my desire is for these rules to be implemented also in the national legislation of Member States. The coming together of experts in this field with the objective of debating the involvement of the public is a good way to support these goals and the development of environmental rights in the future.

Ultimately, a harmonious relationship with nature is the main prerequisite for a high-quality and healthy life.

I wish you every success in your conference.