

## Preface

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What follows are welcoming remarks made at the opening of the international conference "Natural Resource Use Relations in the Trinational Sangha River Region of the Northwest Congo Basin," on which this volume is based, held at Yale University in September of 1997. As a postscript to the remarks which follow, I would like to say how delighted I have been to see the work of the conference continue to blossom into the first bilingual issue of the excellent *Bulletin Series* of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies and into the Sangha River Network, a professional research network which manages information across different institutions, nations, and intellectual traditions for conservation in the Sangha River Region.

Some of you participants in the Sangha River conference come from far; others of you come from within the Yale community. It is fitting and necessary that this conference bring a truly international focus on an important part of the globe. I salute the initiative that brings you all together, and believe it embodies two great strengths of Yale.

First, we at Yale, and at universities like Yale, are sometimes viewed as living in an ivory tower. But I submit to you that many of us have one foot outside of that tower most of the time. The gathering here for the Sangha River conference includes scholars and actors who will sit down at a table to talk together, break bread together, and exchange views in ways that are both formal and informal. The efforts of Heather Eves, Rebecca Hardin, and Stephanie Rupp to organize this conference exemplify the delicate but crucial balance between analysis and activism that universities exhibit at their best.

Second, your gathering demonstrates a wonderful "connectedness" across disciplines. To use Yale as an example again, in this room today are gathered students and faculty from many departments in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, as well as from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. This conference is an enterprise that brings political scientists, as well as economists, historians, anthropologists and legal scholars, into the arena. Collaborative relationships across the separate traditional academic disciplines are cherished and nurtured at Yale, and taken full advantage of by our students.

This is as it should be, for the challenges and problems that we confront globally today are rarely susceptible to solutions that find their homes entirely within the traditional academic disciplines. Certainly these disciplines contribute to finding new insights. But new systems of knowledge are emerging; we must combine our

systems of knowledge with those that originate in other parts of the world to find solutions to some of the difficulties we face, especially concerning the environment.

Those ways forward, those outcomes, arise in meetings such as this, when scholars and actors from different traditions, different epistemological groundings, come together and talk things out. Such discussions are not always amicable. This room is filled with passionately interested and engaged people and I do not anticipate that the next few days will be easy. In fact, I'd suggest that you wouldn't be reaching your potential if they *are* easy.

I urge you to sit down with honesty and shared enterprise as your common cause. I wish you the best in this undertaking. Yale welcomes you, and thanks you for being here.

ALISON RICHARD is Provost and Franklin Muzzy Crosby Professor of the Human Environment at Yale University. She joined the Yale faculty in 1972, and served as Director of the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History from 1991 to 1994. Dr. Richard trained in anthropology and primate biology at Cambridge and London Universities. Her research focuses on the ecology and social behavior of the living primates, and on what these close relatives of humans reveal about the evolution of human society. She has studied primates in Central America, tropical Africa, and the Himalayan foothills, but is most widely known for her work of more than twenty years on the lemurs of Madagascar. In addition to her work as a researcher and university administrator, Dr. Richard has also played an active role in efforts to conserve the remaining forests and wildlife of southwest Madagascar, and in helping to train Malagasy students as resource managers and conservation biologists.