
Good-bye Ricardo, welcome Winnie

Many years have passed since I had the great honour of being elected as the WRM International Coordinator. There are no words that could express my gratitude to those who gave me this opportunity. It has opened up horizons that I was barely aware existed, and allowed me to be, more than a coordinator of anything, a learner of everything.

Throughout all these years, the WRM team that I have had the pleasure of coordinating has always worked from the perspective of learning from people, and sharing that knowledge with those who need it to strengthen their own struggles. This has always been our central focus: the struggles of peoples to defend their rights, their livelihoods and ways of life, their dreams of a better future. The entire wealth of knowledge accumulated by WRM in its quarter century of life has had its source in people, and has flowed back to people. This is probably our greatest strength and our greatest pride.

My “work” as coordinator has also given me the opportunity to interact with a vast and enormously diverse range of individuals around the world – South and North, East and West – united in a common goal: a society based on solidarity and respect between people and cultures, and between these and nature. Through this interaction, we have forged political and personal ties that have undoubtedly contributed to strengthening struggles at the local, regional and global level. At the same time, my duties as WRM coordinator have allowed me to meet some wonderful people who honour me with their friendship and with whom we have travelled many roads together.

By now, it should be obvious that this is more of a farewell than an editorial. It’s true: I am retiring. Not from the struggle, or from WRM, but from the position of WRM coordinator. I am stepping down “rich in beautiful riches” (1) among which are all of those people I have met and learned to love and respect over the course of these many years.

And among those many people, there is one person in particular I would like to mention here, simply because he has been chosen to take over from me as coordinator: Winnie Overbeek. Because of his well-known modesty, I will only say two things about him: I have known him for many years, and I have total confidence in him. I will now leave the editorial open so that he can introduce himself. Welcome Winnie!

Ricardo Carrere

To begin with, I should note how challenging I find this new role in my life, for different reasons: firstly, because I am taking on the coordination of an organization as important as WRM; and secondly, because I am taking over from Ricardo Carrere, a colleague who has relied on his countless strengths to devote himself to this organization for more than 20 years. His own efforts and those of his team have given rise to a vast network of links among individuals, activists and organizations who act on different levels. For many of them, WRM represents an organization worthy of respect and in which they can trust. It is an organization committed to the struggles of local communities for the preservation of their forests, for the defence of their rights, and against the destructive interventions, often promoted as “development”, that threaten their well-being and survival.

While on the one hand there are factors that worry me, there also others that give me a certain amount of peace of mind: the fact of knowing that I can count on numerous partners from different parts of the world in carrying out this work; and that the team that worked with Ricardo will continue working with me. They are a courageous, competent and hard-working group of people and I hope they will be patient with me. Together with this team, we will continue to advance the work that began in Malaysia so many years ago. And we hope that, together with all of you, we will continue to build WRM as a network of individuals, activists, movements and organizations committed to the defence of life, a network that respects and learns from forest communities and collaborates in strengthening their struggles against the various threats to their territories and their ways of life.

I also hope that my experience during these last 15 years of supporting the struggles of indigenous and other communities in Brazil will help me somewhat with this new task. It was during my time with these communities that I first came into contact with WRM, and throughout that time we were also able to count on their important support. That was how I began to feel like a part of WRM and of this network that the organization has helped to build in many different countries.

Finally, another reason for feeling a bit more at ease is the fact that Ricardo has just announced that he is not retiring from WRM, or from the struggle, and so I hope we can continue to count on his invaluable contributions.

Winnie Overbeek

(1) To quote the Argentine singer/songwriter Atahualpa Yupanqui: “Rico de lindas riquezas: guitarra, amigos, canción” (“Rich in beautiful riches: a guitar, friends, song”).